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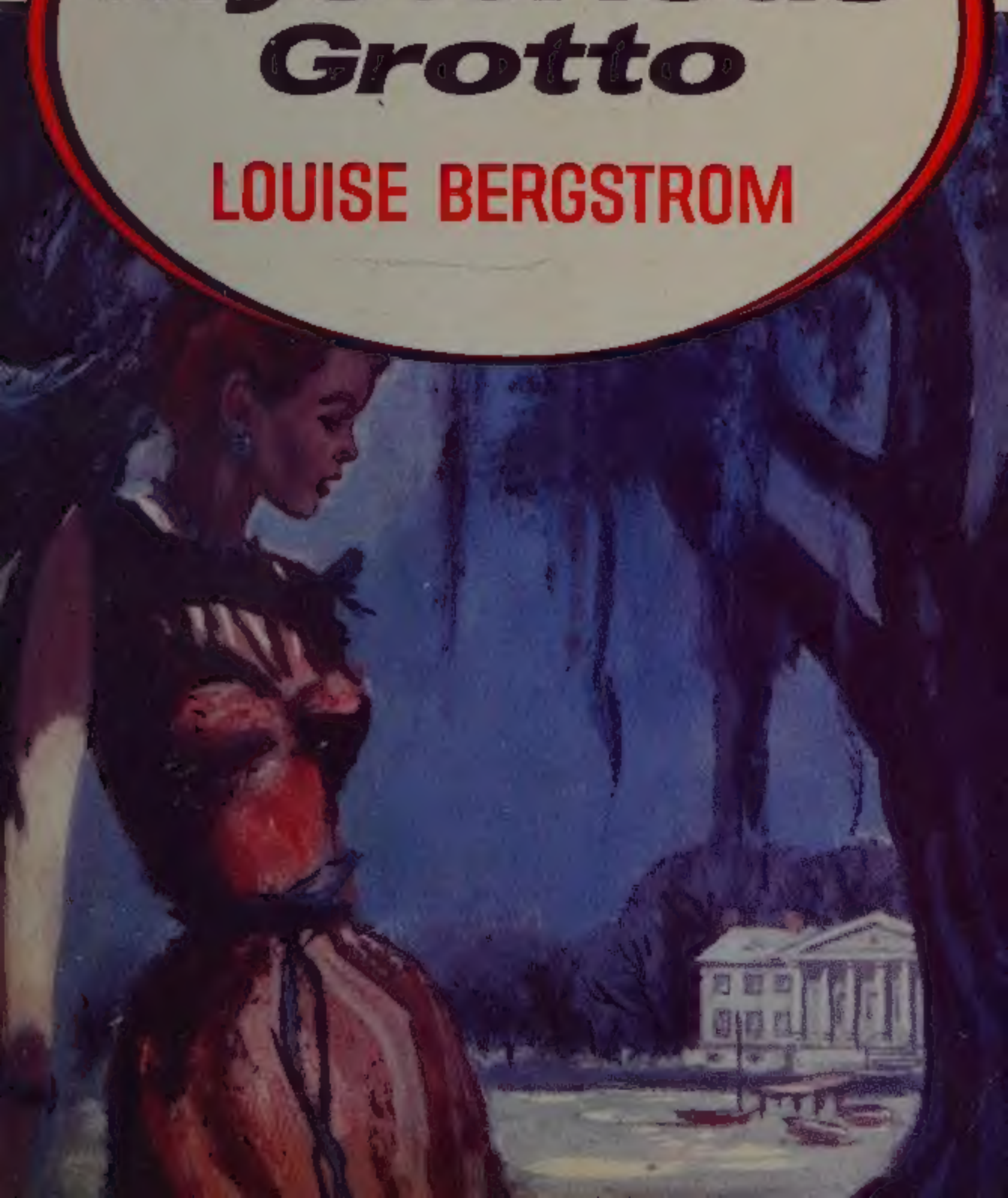
The Mysterious Grotto

LOUISE BERGSTROM



The Mysterious Grotto

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THE MYSTERIOUS GROTTO

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To my aunt, Nell Lewis Macgregor, with love.

Author's Note:

The Grotto in this story is imaginary, and was merely suggested by the real Grotta di Matromania of Capri, thought by some scholars to have been the site of worship and sacrifice to the god Mithras.

CHAPTER ONE

Somehow I had not expected Capri to be so mountainous. In the late afternoon sunlight the jagged peaks loomed ahead forbiddingly as our little steamer approached the Marina Grande. I thought of the island's long history: born out of earthquake; inhabited since the Paleolithic era; used as the setting for the dark deeds of the evil Tiberius; subjected to innumerable raids by barbarians and pirates; fought over by warring nations; made the victim of plagues and volcanic eruptions. It seemed to me that this exquisite place, with its ancient ruins and innumerable caves and grottos, would project an atmosphere of its own, far removed from the gay Capri advertised to tourists.

The island appeared to rise to great heights at both ends, with a depression in between where lay

the town of Capri. The entire island was mountainous, without a really level area anywhere on it.

"Well, what do you think, Kim?" boomed a hearty voice beside me. "Isn't it *magnifico?*"

"*Magnifico,* indeed," I agreed with a smile. Since Fran Bufford and I were both single women traveling with the tour, we had been teamed together in hotel rooms, and I had grown quite fond of the ebullient, fortyish mathematics teacher from Connecticut.

"It's been eleven years since I was here," Fran said a bit wistfully, "but I can't see that it's changed any. It's still, as they say, the Pearl of the Bay!"

"I thought it would be flatter and more tropical, somehow," I said vaguely. "You know, palm trees and things."

"Good heavens, no, child! Not Capri! It's a volcanic island, and so steep you have to be half mountain goat to live there. It has olive groves and cypress trees and all sorts of gorgeous flowers, but they've all been planted by men. Wait until we take the cruise around the island—you'll see that a lot of it looks like a hunk of Wyoming or

Utah, except for the Roman ruins scattered around, of course."

"Are we going to take a cruise around it?"

"Yes, it's on the agenda for tomorrow, after we visit the Blue Grotto—according to old Sally."

Sally was the nickname we had given our tour guide, Salvatore, who had lived some fifteen years in Brooklyn. He had taken over the tour when we got aboard our bus in Milan, and as a guide he left a great deal to be desired; his knowledge of history was appallingly inaccurate, and he had a cute little trick of steering us into all the more expensive shops where he no doubt received a generous kickback.

"I wish we had more than one day on Capri," I said. "It seems so inadequate."

"Well, of course it isn't a very big island and you can hit the high points in a day, but it would be nice to have time to wander around and explore all its fascinating nooks and crannies. I've always thought I'd like to spend a summer here sometime, but I suppose I never will. I wonder what sort of a hotel they'll stick us with this time."

"Oh, I don't really care, Fran. I'm just so happy

to be here!" I turned back to my contemplation of the island, determined that nothing would mar my pure enjoyment of its beauty.

The little steamer we had boarded in Sorrento pulled into the dock at the Marina Grande, and we were herded ashore by the indefatigable Sally: a middle-sized, middle-aged man with unkempt dark hair, a weather-beaten but still handsome face, and shrewd brown eyes.

There were twenty of us on the tour, all teachers from various parts of the United States. It was one of those charter affairs, very reasonable, but it did not always live up to the golden promises of the brochure.

We had been allowed to bring only overnight bags with us to the island, the rest of our luggage remaining locked in our bus at the dock in Sorrento. I soon found out why this restriction had been necessary. Without giving us time to look around the fascinating little shops that surrounded the dock area, Sally led us to the funicular station, from where we were carried up the steep mountainside to the town of Capri, high above the sea. I gazed out with rapture at the glorious vista falling away below us—the blue, blue Mediterranean, and the misty hills of the main-

land with the brooding old Vesuvius in the background.

We left the funicular and walked out across the *terrazza* overlooking the Bay of Naples. Sally rounded us up and led us across the enchanting little piazza, which Fran told me was sometimes called Vanity Square. When we showed signs of lagging here to look around, Sally said impatiently:

"Come, come, you can come back here later. It is now necessary that we check into our hotel."

So off we marched, up and over the hump of the mountain and down the other side, along a narrow street lined with gift shops crammed with merchandise so delectable that I knew it would be extremely difficult for me not to spend my entire shopping allowance in one spot.

The hotel to which we were taken was a white stucco affair with a little courtyard and a glass-walled dining annex. After a brief wait at the desk, a few of us, including Fran and me, were separated from the others and led off across the courtyard and down a flight of steps to a separate building.

The young man who carried our bags showed Fran and me to a room on the second floor of this

building. Immediately he hurried over to the French windows and opened them wide with a triumphant gesture. He looked as proud as though he were unveiling a painting that he had done himself.

I gasped. How could anything be that lovely and still be real? Even the view from the *terrazza* had not prepared me for this. This side of the island dropped steeply down to the sea, with other buildings on various levels below us. The mountainside on our left was dotted with white villas surrounded by flowers and dark cypress trees. Directly below us was a crumbling structure that looked like an ancient cloister, and out of the sea to our left jutted the great mysterious rocks of Capri—the three Faraglioni, bathed in the amber light of the setting sun.

"*Magnifico!*" I cried inadequately.

"Didn't I tell you?" Fran said smugly. "Like nothing else on earth. For this I'll even forgive the tour for that crummy hotel in Rome."

When the boy had gone we explored the room, which was larger than any we had had before. The architecture, like most on the island, was Moorish with delicately curved ceilings and doorways. The floor was of tile, decorated with lovely

little flowers. We had our own bathroom—a luxury not enjoyed in all of our hotels—and even the bathtub was of flowered tile.

I was drawn back to the little balcony outside the French windows.

"I'd like to stay here forever," I sighed. "I could spend the rest of my life just looking at that view."

"No, you couldn't, honey," Fran replied from the bureau, where she was laying out the few things she would need for the night. "That's the odd thing about us humans—nothing impresses us for long after the initial impact wears off. You'd soon be bored."

"Familiarity breeds contempt, you mean? I don't believe it." I was gazing at the Faraglioni in bemused ecstasy. "Never, never, *never* would I tire of this!"

"Oh, yes, you would. I heard of a man who sold everything he owned and moved to Moorea because of its beauty. After two years he was back in Chicago. He said he got so he couldn't even bear to look at the mountain—he had to turn his back on it. I suppose one's soul has a saturation point, even for beauty."

"Well, my soul is still hungrily soaking it up,"

I declared. "And speaking of hunger, what time is dinner?"

"See? Already you're thinking of food for the stomach instead of for the spirit. At seven, I think Sally said. They always serve an early dinner for us uncivilized Americans."

"Then we still have a couple of free hours. There's an errand I have to do here. What about you, Fran?"

"Well, I'm a bit older than you, honey. I'm bushed. All I want right now is a hot bath and a lie-down before dinner. You run along. What sort of an errand is it? If you're going to look for a drugstore, I could use some more toothpaste."

"No, it isn't that kind of an errand, but I will get you the toothpaste."

I went to the mirror and began to brush my hair, which was short and naturally blonde. People were always telling me I looked like a young Doris Day, and I supposed they were right. I was the same general type, sort of bouncy and puppy-friendly with a wide grin and a scattering of freckles across my short nose that made me look younger and more naive than I actually was.

"I have to look up an old acquaintance," I explained. "I know there isn't much time, and we

have a full schedule tomorrow and are leaving the following morning, but I have to work this in somewhere. I promised."

Fran came out from under the dress she was pulling over her head and looked at me with surprise. "You never told me you knew somebody here!" she said almost accusingly.

"Well, I don't, really. It's a girl I knew at boarding school when we were just kids—around fourteen, I think. We lived in Virginia then, and I went to a private girls' boarding school down on the Rappahannock River. This girl was only there a short time, less than a year, but she sort of attached herself to me. I felt sorry for her and tried to look after her. Some of the girls made fun of her—you know how cruel they can be."

"Why did they make fun of her?"

"Oh, she was sort of helpless and always getting into messes. We called her Smudge. She was a plump little thing and clumsy, the type that always has ink smudges on her fingers and spots on her clothes. You know the type."

"Yes, there's one in every class."

"And she cried a lot, so she usually had red eyes and dirty streaks on her face, too. Poor little Smudge. You know, I hadn't thought about her in

years, not until I went back to the Academy in April to be interviewed for a teaching position there next fall. I had a long chat with my old headmistress, Miss Greenstreet, and she brought up the subject of Smudge when I mentioned that I was taking a tour of Italy this summer.

"She asked me if I remembered her, and I had to admit I'd forgotten she'd ever existed. Smudge was one of those children who gets stuck in boarding schools because nobody wants them. Her parents were divorced, and her father was remarried with small children. Her mother was wandering around Europe somewhere. But then, toward the end of the semester, the mother got married again, too, and sent for Smudge. It seemed she had married a Swedish count who lived in a real castle in southern Sweden. Well, that was the last I heard of Smudge. Oh, she wrote once or twice, saying how much she liked Sweden and would I please write to her, but we moved to Pittsburgh that summer and I never got around to answering the letters, and soon I'd forgotten her altogether.

"So when Miss Greenstreet asked me if I remembered Beth Carter, it took a bit of thinking before I could even recall who she was. Miss Greenstreet told me that Beth had been writing to

her all those years and often mentioned me and how much she had liked me. I felt terribly guilty when I thought how I hadn't bothered to write to her. That's why I couldn't say no to Miss Greenstreet when she asked if I'd look Smudge up when I got here."

Fran was sitting on her bed, listening with interest. "But how did she ever end up on Capri?" she asked.

"Well, she's married now to a young man named Jan Isacson—Swedish, of course. They live on a farm in Sweden, but it seems he has a grandmother who lives here. The grandparents came here when the grandfather retired—he's dead now, but the grandmother stayed on. She is quite ill, apparently dying, and she wanted the young people to stay with her this summer. Miss Greenstreet showed me the last letter she'd got from Smudge—I suppose I should say Beth now. Anyway, it worried her."

"In what way?"

I stirred around in my big purse and pulled out a letter.

"Miss Greenstreet gave it to me, because it had Beth's address on it." I opened the letter and read the last few paragraphs aloud:

" 'Capri is beautiful beyond imagining, Miss Greenstreet, but oh, how I miss our beloved farm at Torsby! You remember I told you in my first letter how I felt about the cave—I'm sure that terrible things used to go on down there, and the vibrations they set off remain. I don't even like to go down there to swim any more, although Jan laughs at me. Please don't think I'm getting neurotic, but I have the feeling that something evil is still going on here. I'd like to leave, but of course we have to stay with dear Grandmother until the end. Jan's father insists that some of the family must be here, and it was easier for us to get away.' "

I refolded the letter and laid it on the dresser.

"That's the last letter she got from Beth, although she's written twice to her since. So she's getting worried. That's why she wanted me to look her up."

"How exciting!" Fran exclaimed. "What about that cave? Do you know anything more about it?"

"I asked Miss Greenstreet, and she told me that there is a tunnel—in which steps have been carved—through the rock beneath the villa, and this leads to a cave opening onto a little cove with a sandy beach. That's where they go to swim. The

cove can only be reached by boat—or through the cave. She told me that this cave, or grotto, as they call them here, has a legend. In ancient times, before the Romans came, there was a temple to the god Mithras—where the villa now stands—and it was then that the steps were carved down from the temple to the cave and secret rites were held there—perhaps even human sacrifices!"

"Good heavens! No wonder your friend is scared of the place! Anybody with imagination would be nervous there."

"Smudge always did have an overactive imagination. I remember how scared she got once out on the grounds, thinking she saw something under the big trees. And one night she insisted that a ghost had come into her room and woke her up. I guess she hasn't changed much."

"Well, you must admit a sacrificial cave would rather unnerve anybody, let alone a sensitive young girl! Mithras. I'm not sure that I remember that god. Who was he?"

"I looked him up after I'd talked to Miss Greenstreet. It seems he was of Persian origin, the god of light. There's a white bull mixed up in it somewhere, too. The cult was introduced into Italy by the Greeks and was very popular for a

while. But then the Romans squelched it, and it died out or went underground. Anyway, there's no real proof that the cave was a Mithraic shrine."

I took a snapshot out of the envelope. "This is a picture that was with the letter. I couldn't believe it was really Smudge." I handed it to Fran.

It was a color print showing a young man and a girl leaning against a stone balustrade overlooking the Mediterranean. A bit of the Faraglioni was evident in one corner. The girl was lovely, very slender, with flowing red-gold hair and a sweetly serious expression on her delicate features. The man looked about twenty-five and was a typical blond Scandinavian, very tan, with vivid blue eyes, high cheekbones, and deep creases on each side of his broad smiling mouth.

"I don't know how she managed to turn into such a beauty," I remarked.

"Oh, adolescent girls do change drastically sometimes," Fran said absently. "But the husband! You can have Mithras—I'll take a Norse god any time!"

"Do you want to go along with me—and meet him?" I teased.

"I'd like to—not because of him, but because

you've got me so curious about the place. But I think you should see your friend alone. You can tell me all about it at dinner—unless they invite you to have it with them. It seems likely they would, don't you think?"

"I have no idea, Fran. But I won't stay late in any event."

"How are you going to find it?"

"The villa where they live is called the Casa Capriccio, and the address is on the envelope. I'll ask the desk clerk how to get there. It's in Capri, so I ought to be able to walk to it."

"Well, good luck! And don't let the goblins get you!"

"I won't!" I laughed, and went out.

The desk clerk gave me clear instructions how to find the villa, and I set off along the street, on a level below the hotel. It was a calm, warm evening and the air was exhilarating. I wanted to run and shout with the sheer delight of being there. I could not believe that there could be anything ominous at the end of my journey. Beth had probably just been too lazy to write. I knew that if I lived here I would probably sink into an ecstatic stupor and just sit around looking at the sea.

What if there had been cruel and dreadful things done on this island in the past? That was all over now.

I followed a winding way to a street on a still lower level, as I had been directed, until I reached a flight of steps leading to a villa perched on the hillside like a nesting bird. On the wrought-iron gate at the foot of the steps I saw the name "Casa Capriccio." This was the place. The gate wasn't locked, so I opened it and climbed the steps to another gate opening onto a stone-flagged terrace with a balustrade. I recognized it as the place where the snapshot had been taken. The house was a two-storied white stucco with a balcony across the front of the second floor. Its doors and windows reflected the Moorish influence, as did most Caprian houses.

This gate was locked and had a brass bell hanging on one post, so I pulled the chain that dangled from it. It rang in a sweet tone, and a few minutes later a woman came out of the house and approached the gate. She was middle-aged and rather plump, with graying blonde hair pulled back from a widow's peak into a tight bun at the back of her head. On each side of her face a thick roll of flesh had formed, sagging down into a sort

of scallop at chin level. She looked as though she had been made from soft clay that ran a bit before it hardened. She wore a black cotton dress and a white apron, so I presumed she was a servant.

A few feet from the gate she paused and regarded me with an expression of bland inquiry.

"Ja?" she said.

I remembered that these people were Swedish, and apparently they had imported their own servants.

"I am looking for Beth Isacson," I said, trying to speak slowly and distinctly, hoping that she understood English. "I am a friend from the United States."

The bland expression did not alter perceptibly, yet somewhere deep in the light blue eyes was a tiny flicker of something nameless.

"Fru Isacson not here," she replied in halting English.

"But she must be!" I exclaimed. "I mean, she is staying here, isn't she—with her husband, Jan? Do you mean that she has gone out for a while?"

The woman shook her head emphatically. "Not live here. Gone."

"Her husband, too? Is he gone?"

"Gone."

"But—where are they?"

"Torsby. Back to farm." She gave me a small, appeasing smile. "I am sorry, Froken." She turned and went back into the house.

Well, so much for that! I thought. After all my imaginings, it was quite an anticlimax. But why had they gone home? Beth had said quite plainly that they must stay until the grandmother—

Suddenly I realized what must have happened: old Fru Isacson must have died, so Beth and Jan had been free to go home. It was as simple as that.

I turned and walked slowly down the long flight of steps to the street. And all the way down, until I was out of sight of the house, I felt a prickling at the back of my neck, as though someone—or some*thing*—were watching me from the villa.

CHAPTER TWO

When I reached the hotel, on an impulse I stopped again at the desk. The young man looked up at me and smiled.

"Did you find the villa, *signorina?*" he inquired.

"Yes, but my friend wasn't there. Do you know anything about the owner? The old lady—Mrs. Isacson?"

"Ah, yes, she has been here many years, a charming person. A pity she is so ill."

"Then she is still living?"

"*Si*—she lives. One hesitates to say how long, but she lives. A great spirit, that one!"

"Thank you." I went thoughtfully on to our room.

Fran was stretched out on her bed reading a paperback mystery, and she looked up in surprise.

"Back already? What happened?"

I tossed my purse onto my bed and walked over to the windows to look out at the view that still seemed too perfect to be real.

"She wasn't there," I said flatly.

"Oh, that's a shame. Had they gone out for the evening?"

"No; according to the maid, Beth and her husband have gone back to their farm in Sweden."

"Was the old grandmother there?"

"I suppose so."

"Then you should have talked to her."

"Oh, Fran, she is practically on her deathbed. I'm sure the maid wouldn't have let me in to see her. As a matter of fact, she seemed awfully anxious to get rid of me."

"Aha!"

"What do you mean—aha?" I said crossly.

"There's dirty work at the crossroads! Maybe they've got your friend Beth locked up in a tower."

"The villa doesn't have any towers."

"Well, that cave, then. Yes, that's it! The evil cave!"

"You read too many of those paperbacks." I glanced at her irritably over my shoulder. "You're being ridiculous."

"Of course," she admitted comfortably, "but it was so exciting, about the cave and the secret rites and your friend thinking there was something wrong at the villa, I hate to have it all fizzle out into nothing. Don't you?"

"Of course not. I only went there to make sure Smudge was all right, because Miss Greenstreet was worried about her. Now that I know she's safely back on the farm, there's nothing more I can do."

"But that's just it! How do you know she's back on the farm? Are you willing to take a maid's word for it?"

"Of course. Why would she lie about a thing like that?"

"I don't know. But Beth did say in the letter that they couldn't leave so long as the grandmother was still living."

"Yes, but something must have come up. Honestly, Fran, it really isn't any of my business, you know. What do you think I should do—go back and scream at the gate until somebody lets me in?"

"Well—no. But the whole thing just seems sort of odd." Fran sighed and went back to her book.

I took off my shoes and dropped onto my bed.

But when I picked up a magazine and tried to read, I found it difficult to concentrate on the pages before me. Somehow the whole thing seemed sort of odd to me, too.

The following morning our day of sightseeing began with a trip to the Blue Grotto.

Fran kept grumbling about its being the wrong time of day for it, and that the sun should be shining more brightly—it was partly cloudy—but I was satisfied with the visual effects in the grotto. Sally had arranged to take us to the boat landing by bus, so we were spared the harrowing experience of transferring from a launch to one of the bobbing rowboats. The sea was calm that day, so we got into the grotto without too much of a soaking. I found the entire experience enchanting.

Fran bought one of the hideous flowered cloth purses from a woman with a boatload of the things.

"I know it's ugly," she admitted cheerfully, "but whenever I look at it, I'll think of Capri. I've never seen them any place else."

I was satisfied with the little copper figure of

Pan I had purchased in one of the shops that morning. To me the creature, with its nonhuman face, was far more evocative of this enchanting island than an ugly flowered bag.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, then Sally informed us that those who wished could take the tour around the island by boat. Those who wanted to swim could wear bathing suits under their clothes, and the boat would stop at a suitable place for swimming.

There were only about nine of us from the tour who wanted to make the trip; the others preferred to shop or visit other places of interest on the island. Since many of our group had been here before, that was not surprising. It was a hot day and I was eager for a swim, so I put on my bathing suit and covered it with a sleeveless sweater and shorts.

"I'm going along," Fran said, "but I don't intend to swim. I've done this before, but I thought I'd go, anyway, and maybe get a glimpse of that cave—if you can point out the villa to me from the boat."

That hadn't occurred to me, but it was an interesting idea.

"I think I can locate it," I told her. "The houses here look pretty much alike, but I know

the approximate location, and the cave should be visible from the water."

"Don't forget your hat," Fran warned. "You can get sunstroke going around here bareheaded."

I found the canvas hat with a brim that I carried for such contingencies, slung my camera and binoculars around my neck, and we went to the courtyard to join the others who were going on the boat tour. Sally led us up the hill and over to the funicular station, and we rode down to the Marina Grande, where we boarded a motor launch.

The boat headed west past the Bagni di Tiberio and the remains of the Palazzo a Mare, and on beneath the towering cliffs that plunged down from the Anacapri plateau. We cruised by many grottos, including the famous Blue one that we had visited that morning, still crowded with rowboats full of eager tourists and bag vendors. Then we came around the southern end of the island and along a series of all sorts of grottos, some of which we entered. I thought that the Green Grotto, although smaller, was as beautiful as the Blue.

Sally kept up a running commentary, pointing out the various sights. I was surprised to see how rugged and barren the southern end of the island was; as Fran had remarked, it was very much like our own West. We passed the Sirens' Rock and the Marina Piccola—the place where most people go to swim. There were many villas in this area.

When we got to where we could see the town of Capri, Fran said, "Keep a sharp watch; we must be almost to your villa."

We were quite close to shore and moving slowly. In a moment I saw the entrance to a cave, partly hidden by jagged rocks rising from the sea. But among the rocks I could make out the opening to a tiny cove, barely large enough for a rowboat to go through. Above this, perched on the side of a cliff, was a gleaming white villa with a stone balustrade and a wrought-iron railing along its balcony.

"That's it!" I cried, pointing to it.

The man who was piloting our boat pulled in as close as possible to the shore.

"It is believed, although the facts have never been verified," Sally explained in his self-important voice, "that this cave once contained an altar to the ancient Greek god Mithras—"

"Persian," I corrected him, and he gave me an annoyed glance.

"—and that there was once a temple to the god, which was destroyed by the Romans, built where the house now stands. It is also believed—"

I had been studying the villa through my binoculars, and I now let out a cry of astonishment and jumped to my feet in the rocking boat.

"He's there!" I yelled. "I see him!"

"Who? Who's there?" Fran shaded her eyes and gazed up to where I was pointing.

"Miss Stewart! If you will kindly sit down!" Sally said in great annoyance. "You are endangering not only yourself but the boat—"

"It's Jan! Jan Isacson—Smudge's husband! They haven't gone away!" In my excitement I came perilously close to pitching head first over the side of the boat.

"Miss Stewart! I demand—"

"All right! All right!" I sat down hastily but continued to gaze at the Casa Capriccio. Even without the glasses we were so close that I could see the young man leaning on the balustrade of the terrace. He was slender and blond, and with the binoculars I could see his features distinctly: the young man of the snapshot, without a doubt.

As I watched, he turned and went into the house.

The boat resumed its cruising speed, and we were quickly out of sight of the villa.

"I saw him, too," Fran said. "He sure did look like Jan!"

"What do you make of it, Fran?" I asked.

"You sound like Sherlock Holmes, but I'm no Dr. Watson! I don't make anything of it, except that the maid lied to you. Maybe they don't want any visitors. You didn't see Beth, though, did you?"

"No."

"Well, there you are! She's probably locked in the dungeon!" Fran said cheerfully. "I told you so."

"Fran, I've got to go back there and find out what's going on! They've got to let me in!"

"Okay. Don't look so fierce! You can go when we get back from this little expedition. We have some free time before dinner. No doubt there's a perfectly logical explanation."

"And now," droned Sally, "we are approaching the world-famous rocks known as the Faraglioni, the highest of which is over three hundred and fifty feet. On the outer rock, the Scopolo, you will find the Blue Lizard, the nesting place of many

gulls. You can see that the middle rock, di Mezzo, has an archway through which our boat will pass. Sometimes there are reflections there similar to those in the Blue Grotto."

In spite of my excitement and the wild conjectures that were going through my mind, I was deeply thrilled by the sight of the magnificent rocks we were approaching. I had seen pictures of them on travel posters all my life, but I had never realized they were so big.

We glided through the opening of the center rock and on to the other side, with the dancing blue water around us. After that there were more grottos, one of which was above the water level, and we left the boat and climbed up to it.

I gave only half my attention to the scenery; the other half was occupied with thoughts of the Casa Capriccio. Had they done something to Beth? Maybe she had become ill and had to be sent home—but then why was Jan still there when the servant had said he was gone? Had he returned unexpectedly? No, somehow I felt that he had been there all along; had been watching me while I talked to the maid at the gate.

Whatever the explanation, I had to find out. I owed that much to my old schoolmate, and Miss

Greenstreet would never forgive me if I didn't make some attempt to learn the truth.

I admired the scenery and took a lot of pictures, but all the time I was plagued with mental images of poor Smudge tied up in some loathsome corner of the cave or lying on her bed in a drugged stupor. But why they should treat her like that was beyond imagination. Why should they want to get rid of her? She wasn't an heiress or anything.

The worst of it was that I kept seeing her husband's face in my mind's eye: the vivid blue of his eyes, the humorously curving mouth, the pleasing shape of his jaw—

Good heavens! I thought. What's the matter with me? The man is married to an old friend—if he hasn't already murdered her!

We passed beneath an awesome cliff and Sally said dramatically:

"This is known as the Salto di Tiberio—the Leap of Tiberius—and it is almost one thousand feet high. When the emperor lived here, he took delight in torturing Christians and throwing them from this cliff when he had finished with them. Sometimes, they say, even now their screams can be heard—"

Even in my absorption with other matters, I couldn't let that go unchallenged.

"Nonsense!" I said loudly. "Tiberius didn't torture Christians—how could he? There weren't any then. When he lived on Capri, Christianity hadn't been invented yet."

Sally looked furious but restrained himself. "How fortunate," he murmured nastily, "that some of us are so well informed!"

Soon after that we stopped near a point where large, fairly flat rocks jutted out into the water, and those who wished to swim removed their outer clothing and plunged into the clear water.

I had always read of the vivid blue of the Mediterranean, and my first view of it had proved rather disappointing; it hadn't seemed any bluer than any other large body of water. But now as I swam I noticed a curious phenomenon: no matter how blue other water looked from a distance, when you were actually in it, it merely looked like water, without any distinct color—but here the water was actually a vivid dark blue all around me.

I swam with the deep pleasure I always feel in water, and as I passed beneath a jutting cliff I was startled to see what appeared to be a little boy

perched on the edge of the rock. Then I saw that it was only a statue of a boy in a seated position, gazing out to sea in the manner of the Copenhagen mermaid.

That was the charm of Capri, I mused, floating on my back and gazing up at the little figure. Everywhere one encountered the unexpected, the unexplained, and always there was the beauty, the heartbreaking beauty.

Soon we were on our way again, more grottos, more looming cliffs, until we arrived back at the Marina Grande. Up the funicular and across the piazza and back over the hill to our charming Hotel La Residenza, where I hastened to remove my clothes, now soaking wet from being pulled on over my bathing suit.

I showered and rinsed the salt water out of my hair, then put on a sleeveless flowered shift.

"In the movies," I remarked regretfully, gazing at my image in the mirror, "they show a girl swimming in the sea without a cap, her hair streaming. Then she gets out, and in the next shot there she is, her hair dry and looking perfect. That would be a nice trick if I knew how to do it."

"Oh, what are you complaining about," Fran

said absently, settling on her bed with a sigh of relief. "Your hair always looks nice. I suppose you're preparing to invade the Casa Capriccio."

"Indeed I am!"

"What will you do if the maid still insists nobody is there?"

I paused with my hairbrush in midair. That was a good question.

"I don't know," I said, "but I'll think of something!"

"Well, good luck, dear. If you're not back by dinnertime, I'll call out the *gendarmeria*—or whatever they call the local fuzz."

"Thank you," I said. "You do that." I picked up my purse and hurried out. My skin was beginning to feel a bit prickly from sitting in the boat so long. Even on a partly cloudy day, the sun could do a lot of damage if you weren't careful.

As I walked I kept going over little speeches in my mind that I would make to the maid when I reached the villa. I would be firm, but dignified. This time I would not take no for an answer. I had to get into the villa!

Once again I climbed the stone steps and rang the bell at the gate. Once again, after a brief wait,

the plump maid in black came out of the house. She recognized me at once.

"Froken," she said a bit reprovingly, "your friend is not here. I told you—"

"I know," I interrupted, "but only a short time ago I saw Jan Isacson on this terrace. I want to see him—to talk to him—"

"But he is not here. I tell you—"

"I saw him!" I clutched the wrought-iron gate, suppressing an urge to shake it, like a monkey in a zoo.

At that point a young man came out of the house and approached us, regarding me with amused eyes.

I pointed my finger at him and cried triumphantly, "There he is!"

He spoke to the maid in Swedish and she went away, giving me a final, disapproving glance. Then he smiled at me and came over to the gate.

"I do not know what this is all about," he said in excellent, though charmingly accented English, "but I am sorry if there has been a misunderstanding. May I help you? I am Herr Isacson."

CHAPTER THREE

He opened the gate and I stepped in, still bristling with indignation.

"The maid said you weren't here!" I protested.

"She did? Whom did you wish to see?"

"I'm a friend of your wife's, but your maid kept telling me that—"

He held up his hand in laughing protest. "Wait a moment! I have no wife. Is it possible that you are mistaking me for my brother, Jan?"

"You're not Jan?" I asked blankly.

"No, I am afraid not. I am Arne, his older brother. It is true that Jan and Beth have gone back to Torsby."

Now that I was standing close to him, I could see that he was not as tall as the man in the snapshot, nor as strongly built. He was not so well tanned, either, and looked to be around thirty. But I liked the glint of humor in his eyes and the

way they crinkled in the corners when he smiled. I felt exceedingly foolish.

"Oh," I said. "I'm sorry. I seem to have made a mistake."

He held out his hand, still smiling. "A fortunate mistake for me. You say you are a friend of Beth's?"

I took his hand and he gave me a little bow.

"Yes, we went to school together in Virginia. I'm Kim Stewart."

"I am delighted to meet you, Miss Stewart. But please—you look so flushed. Have you been walking in the sun without a hat? Come and sit down and let me get you something cool to drink." He led me over to a white wrought-iron table and chairs under a colorful umbrella.

"It's sunburn," I explained. "I was out in a boat this afternoon for quite a while."

"Then you certainly need something to drink." He went into the house and came out in a few minutes carrying a tray with a pitcher of fruit punch and two glasses on it.

"People often mistake Jan and me for each other—when we are not together," he told me, filling my glass. "I have never thought we look so much alike, however. He is much bigger than I

and more handsome. Women have always preferred Jan." He smiled whimsically.

Women, I thought, didn't know a good thing when they saw it!

"I've only seen a snapshot of him," I explained, "and you look a lot like the young man in that—only older."

He made a face. "Oh, much, much older!" he exclaimed.

I could feel my face get even redder. I couldn't seem to stop making stupid remarks. "I didn't mean it quite like that," I said lamely.

He filled his own glass and lifted it. "Skal!" he said.

"Skal." I took a sip, and it tasted delicious.

"It's too bad you missed Beth," he said. "She hasn't been gone long."

"Is she all right?" I asked.

He glanced at me quickly and said, "Why do you ask that?"

"Well—she sounded so distressed in the last letter she wrote Miss Greenstreet."

"Miss Greenstreet?"

"Our old headmistress."

"I see." He frowned and looked into his glass.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Stewart, she left here because of an unfortunate accident."

"An accident? Was she badly hurt?"

"She fell on the steps to the cave and broke her arm and sustained a bad concussion. She might have been killed. She was taken to a hospital in Naples and later flown home to Sweden. It seems she had developed quite an aversion to the cave—in fact to the entire villa—and didn't want to return here."

"She mentioned that in her letters," I told him. "That she was afraid of the cave. But what was she doing on the steps? She said she never went down to the cave any more—"

He hesitated, then said rather reluctantly, "She imagined that she heard things down there. The night of the accident she claimed that she saw a light down in the tunnel and heard voices, so she started to investigate and fell."

"I don't see how she dared! Why didn't she get Jan to go?"

"She says that she couldn't wake him. And she was determined to find out if there was really anything in the cave, or if it was all her imagination, as Jan claimed."

I was horrified at the thought of the timid Beth creeping down the dark steps alone in the night.

"Do you think she really heard something?" I demanded.

He shrugged, and his eyes did not quite meet mine. "Who knows? There are strange stories told about it. The natives call it the *grotta misteriosa* —the mysterious grotto. They say it was once a place of worship for an ancient god—"

"I know. Mithras. But surely you don't believe in ghosts, Herr Isacson!"

He still would not look at me; he smiled faintly into his drink and murmured, " 'There are more things in Heaven and earth—' "

If he was trying to scare me, he was doing a fairly good job. I felt cold under my sunburn. But also a little angry. Somehow I had the feeling that he was pulling my leg. I decided to change the subject.

"So you have come to take their place?" I asked.

"Yes. My parents would have come, but my father cannot get away, and he asked me to stay with Farmor—my grandmother, you know."

"She is very ill?"

"She is dying," he replied sadly. "The doctor

says she may last another month, but not much longer."

"I'm sorry."

"I will miss her, but she is ready to go. She misses my grandfather, who died four years ago. They were inseparable. Since she refuses to return to Stockholm, I will stay until the end. My father will be here soon, but he did not want her alone at all. I have been spending my weekends here—my job is in Rome—but now I am on leave."

"What do you do?"

"My father is the editor of a Stockholm newspaper, and I work for him as a correspondent in Rome. My grandfather was the editor before him, and I am supposed to follow in their footsteps. But Jan is quite different; he prefers to farm. He and Beth live with our other grandparents, Axel and Rosa Lundback, who have a big estate near Torsby. Someday Jan will inherit it, since they—our grandparents—had no sons, only the daughter, Paulina, who married Karl Isacson, our father. Did you know Beth well?"

"No, only for a short time when we were fourteen. It was really Miss Greenstreet who asked me to look her up when she heard I was coming to Capri. They have always corresponded."

"Beth is a lovely girl. A bit high-strung perhaps, but sweet. I am very fond of her. Will you be on Capri long?"

"My tour leaves in the morning."

"I am sorry you will not be here longer. Farmor would have loved to meet you. She is an American, too."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes. That was why she wanted Beth here —she said she wanted another American to talk to. But Beth is more Swedish than American now, it seems to me."

"You speak English very well, Herr Isacson."

"I was in London for three years. Where will you go next?"

"Florence, then Venice, then back to Milan and on home. It's a circle tour; we started in Milan, then drove down to Genoa and followed the coast road to Rome. Then down to Naples and Sorrento and over here to Capri."

"You came here from Sorrento? It must have been exciting, coming down to the pier by bus." he laughed.

"You mean because of the curves and the tree? Yes, we had a time getting past that. Why don't they cut it down?"

"I doubt that it would occur to them. Do you like Italy?"

"I adore it! But I hate being whisked through it so fast. Old Sally, our guide, is a real tyrant! He only let us see one villa in Pompeii! And he's always dragging us through cathedrals when I'd rather go to art museums. My friend Fran says he's probably getting a kickback from God."

"She sounds like a real character!" He grinned.

"She is." We were silent for a moment, and then, feeling that he was probably anxious to get rid of me, I said, "Well, I'd better be getting back to the hotel. If you write to Beth, tell her I was here."

"I certainly will." We stood up, and as I turned to go, the maid came out again and said something to Arne.

"My grandmother heard us talking down here," he explained to me, "and insists that I bring you up to have coffee with her. Could you possibly spare the time? It would mean a great deal to her. She has developed such a nostalgia for anything American these last months."

"Is she well enough to have company?" I asked doubtfully.

"Yes. She is very weak, of course, but not in much pain. She enjoys company."

"Then I'll stay," I decided.

"Good!" He took my arm and led me into the large, tiled entrance hall and up a beautiful flight of curving stairs to a bedroom at the front of the house. It, too, was decorated in flowered tiles and had pale blond furniture and glass doors opening onto the balcony. It was cool and airy and scented with flowers—nothing like the dismal sickroom I had expected. A chaise longue had been placed just inside the glass doors, and Fru Isacson was lying there where she could gaze down on the Faraglioni and the glittering sea.

We went over to her, and she smiled and held out a frail little hand. She seemed very old and incredibly delicate, but her dark eyes radiated intelligence and spirit and humor. Her hair was pure white, very curly, and cut close to her head. She had a thin, pointed little nose, the tip of which moved excitedly when she spoke.

"Kim!" she exclaimed in a much stronger voice than I had thought possible. "What a strange coincidence that you should suddenly appear at Capriccio!"

I took her hand and looked at her in astonishment. "I don't understand," I said.

"No, of course not. Please, sit down and I'll tell you."

Arne pulled over two chairs and we sat down close to her.

She went on eagerly: "You see, during the last month when Beth was here, I wanted her to talk to me about her life in the States. As it turned out, she remembered very little about those days except for the time she went to school in Virginia. She was usually being dragged around Europe by her mother, you know. Anyway, she talked to me by the hour about those days in the Academy, and particularly about the wondrous Kim, who was so much smarter and prettier and kinder than any of the other girls!"

I was horribly embarrassed. "Oh, Fru Isacson," I protested, "she remembers me all out of proportion to the truth. Just because I tried to be a little nice to her—"

"It was more than that, my dear. Of course, I realize that she was exaggerating, but you really did go out of your way to befriend the poor little thing, and she has never forgotten you." She

looked at me, her dark eyes twinkling. "You're just as pretty as she said you were! Don't you think so, Arne?"

He grinned at me. "I never heard Beth talk about her, but whatever she said, I doubt that it did Miss Stewart justice."

"You could pass for a Swede with that blonde hair. Do you have any Scandinavian ancestry, Kim?"

"Not that I know of. English, mostly, and a little French."

"Do you still live in Virginia?"

"No, we moved to Pittsburgh after that year when Beth knew me, but I'm going back to the Academy in the fall to teach."

"I'm sure you will enjoy that. Are you just out of college?"

"I've been out a year. This past winter I was subbing in Pittsburgh. Jobs aren't too easy to get right now. I'm very happy about getting a position at the Academy."

"It must be beautiful there on the river, from what Beth has told me. Do you know the Lake Chautauqua region?"

"Yes, I spent a vacation at the old Institute once. I loved it there."

Her little face fairly glowed. "Oh, yes, it is a wonderful place! I was born and raised on a farm across the lake from the Institute! My parents were Swedish immigrants, so it was never hard for me to return to Sweden to live after I married, but I have always considered myself a true American, all the same."

The maid, who had given me so much trouble at the gate, came in at that point with a tray and proceeded to set out a coffee serving on the table beside the chaise longue. She was introduced to me as Eva Lindgren.

"Eva has been with me many years," Fru Isacson told me. "I don't know what I'd do without her and her husband, Emil. She came to work for Ivar and me in Stockholm when she was just a girl. Later she married Emil, our gardener. When Ivar retired and we decided to live on Capri, we persuaded them to come with us. Ivar wanted Swedish servants, you know, as he never learned to speak Italian very readily. I have never had any difficulty with it myself, and Arne speaks it like a native." She smiled fondly at her grandson. "He is very good with languages."

"How long have you lived on Capri?" I asked.

"For nearly twenty years. We were very happy

here." She looked wistfully around her beautiful room. "I could not bear to leave it now; it is my home. Ivar is buried in the International Cemetery, and I will be with him there. Karl wants me to come back to Stockholm, but that I cannot do. I want to die here at Capriccio. I am getting very good care, and it will not be much longer now."

When we had finished our coffee and delicious little rolls, a nurse entered and said something in Italian. Fru Isacson nodded and turned to us.

"She says I must rest now, but I told her I want a few minutes alone with Kim. Will you leave us now, Arne?"

He rose and put his chair aside, then kissed her withered cheek.

"Do not tire yourself, Farmor," he said, and left. I moved closer to the old lady, wondering why she wanted to see me alone.

"Kim," she said urgently, "is there any reason why you have to be back in the States when your tour ends?"

"Why, no," I said in surprise, "not really. My new position doesn't start until September, but I've spent all my money on this tour—"

She dismissed the idea of money with an impatient wave of her hand.

"I want you to stay here with me, Kim. I know

this is sudden, but I have so little time, and everything I do now must be on impulse. I wanted Beth here because she is an American. I wanted someone with me to whom I could talk about America. I don't know why, but these days I seem to think more about my childhood than any other period of my life. Call it an old woman's dying whim, if you like. But it is very important to me. You are more American than Beth. I want you with me, Kim. Just as a companion for a few hours every day. You would have a great deal of time for yourself, and I will pay you well and see that you are sent home safely."

I was taken completely by surprise. "Why—why, I don't know," I faltered. "I'd have to think about it."

"Of course. But if you are leaving in the morning, there isn't much time. Will you call Arne this evening? Just let it be—an impulse, like mine. If you think you would enjoy staying here for a little while—"

"I know I would love it here," I told her. "All right, I'll call back in a few hours. But you don't know anything about me—"

"Nonsense, child. Do you think after all these years I am not a quick judge of character? And I

know a great deal about you from Beth. I hope you will decide to stay. I would like that very much." She leaned back, and I could see the lines of tiredness and pain around her eyes.

I stood up. "Good-bye, Fru Isacson. Thank you for the coffee—and your kind offer. I will certainly consider it."

She took the hand I held out and looked up at me pleadingly.

"There is something wrong here, you know, Kim," she said urgently. "No one will tell me anything—but what happened to poor Beth, maybe you could find out! I want to know. After all, Capriccio is my home."

The nurse, a buxom young woman with snapping black eyes, returned and indicated firmly that I was to leave. I went slowly down the stairs to the terrace, where Arne was waiting. He looked at me quizzically.

"She asked you to stay?" he said.

"How did you guess?"

"Elementary. Anyway, I eavesdropped."

"Do you think I should?"

"You mean you are seriously considering it?"

"Shouldn't I?"

He hesitated. It was obvious that he was less

than enchanted with the prospect of my joining their little household. I had a stubborn streak that thrived on opposition. I had not really intended to come back to Capriccio, but now—

"That would be up to you, of course," he said politely, "but as you can see, my grandmother is very ill. She could die at any time, and you would have missed part of your tour for nothing."

"Whatever little time she has," I retorted, "I should think you would want her to have anything she asks for. Anything to make her a little happier—"

"Of course." His face was quite expressionless. "You will let us know, then?"

"Yes. I'll let you know."

He opened the gate for me, and I started down the steps. I had nearly reached the bottom when he called:

"Wait, Miss Stewart. I will walk to the hotel with you."

CHAPTER FOUR

At first he made light, meaningless conversation, but when we paused for a moment at a bend in the walk where the view was particularly spectacular, he said earnestly, "Miss Stewart, I did not mean to offend you. I am afraid I gave you the impression that I did not want you at Capriccio."

"You did, rather," I replied coolly.

"It really is not that at all. Nothing personal, I mean. Under different circumstances I would be delighted to have you as a guest. *Herre Gud,* why shouldn't I? You are a lovely young girl and I am a perfectly normal man! But the way things are—"

"How are they, Herr Isacson?" I asked.

He sighed. "I can see that the only way to deal with you, Miss Stewart, is to be entirely frank."

"Yes, that would be refreshing."

He gave me a rueful smile. "Apparently opposition only makes you more determined, and I am defeating my own objective—"

"Which is to keep me out of the Casa Capriccio?"

"Exactly. We are still not sure, you know, what happened to Beth. I would certainly not care to run the risk of anything similar happening to you."

I frowned. "Are you referring to the supernatural? I'm afraid I can't buy that, Herr Isacson. Beth always was an overly imaginative child, and I think she was simply impressed by the legend of the grotto.

His reply was slow, rather hesitant, and I felt that he was searching for a few convincing words out of a great many that he did not want to impart to me.

"It is always possible that there was more to it than that. Something . . . possibly dangerous."

"If you can't tell me anything more definite than that, I'm not unduly alarmed, Herr Isacson. I'm willing to take my chances. Your grandmother seems to want me rather badly, and I would enjoy spending more time on the island."

"Your mind is made up, then?"

"No, as I said, I want to think about it. But if I decide not to stay, it won't be because you've tried to frighten me off!"

We walked on and soon reached the hotel. I could see that he did not intend to tell me anything more that he might know about the disturbance in the grotto, although it was obvious that he at least had some definite suspicions about it.

Some of the members of my tour and other hotel guests were in the courtyard having drinks from the little outdoor bar. Fran was sitting at one of the tables, and her eyes lit up with curiosity and excitement when she saw us. We went over and I introduced her to Arne. He bowed over her hand in the Swedish manner.

"So—you turned out to be a brother!" she said when I had explained the situation. "Are there any more at home like you?"

He laughed. "Only Jan and me, I am afraid."

"Won't you sit down and have a drink?" she invited.

"Thank you, but I must return to the villa." He took my hand. "You will call me later, Miss Stewart?"

"Yes."

"Well!" said Fran when he had gone. "What's going on here?"

I sat down and told her about Fru Isacson's offer, and also about how Arne had tried to discourage my accepting it.

"Oh, honey," Fran protested when I had finished, "you can't be seriously considering it? Especially if he doesn't want you here. You know nothing about these people. And in a foreign country, far from home, with little money—what would your parents say?"

"I'm a big girl now, Fran. I make my own decisions."

"You could end up being fished out of the Mediterranean," she said gloomily.

"That's ridiculous."

"Is it? You say this Arne mentioned possible danger—"

"If an old, helpless woman can live at the villa, why can't I?"

"Well, you might snoop, like Beth did, and you know what happened to her!"

"I think her fall was an accident. As a girl she was always falling off things and over things. I never saw her without a few bruises."

"Are you sure you don't want to stay because of that man's pretty blue eyes? You'd better watch out—you know how Swedes are!"

"No, I don't. I've never known any. And I don't think you have, either! Anyway, that has nothing to do with it."

"Why do you want to stay, then?"

"Lots of reasons. I'd like more time on this island, I could use the money from a summer job —and I'm curious about that grotto."

Fran groaned. "You know what happened to the cat!"

"What cat?"

"The curious one."

"Well, I've got to think about it some more."

I went on to our room and dropped down on my bed. I tried to be honest with myself. What was the real reason I wanted to stay? Was it because I felt sorry for a dying old woman, or was it because I was so attracted to the island? Or could it be Arne?

No, of course not. I didn't know him; I didn't even like him particularly. I had the feeling he was up to something at Capriccio that he didn't want me to find out about.

The whole situation intrigued me enormously. I sensed that I was part of an invisible pattern, that Destiny had brought me here at this particular time to play out the role that had been written for me. It was as though I had been sent to take Beth's place—

My thoughts revolved endlessly like the caterpillars in a poem I had once read, crawling around the rim of a jar. Finally I realized that there wasn't any use going over and over the same points, that it was simply a question of instinct, and my instinct told me to stay. I picked up the telephone and asked the desk to connect me with the Casa Capriccio. In a few minutes I heard Arne's voice:

"Herr Isacson, here." He must have been waiting near the telephone.

"This is Kim Stewart. I've decided to accept your grandmother's offer. Will you tell her?"

For a moment there was silence at the other end of the line, then he said politely, "Very well, Miss Stewart. We will expect you in the morning." He hung up without even saying good-bye.

I made a childish face at the telephone.

"Well, Herr Isacson," I told it, "you may not

like it, but you're certainly going to have to lump it!"

Sally was not at all pleased when I broke the news to him. Not that he minded getting rid of me, but he hated to have even the slightest of his arrangements upset.

"This is highly irregular!" he protested. "Do not think for one moment that you can get a refund on your return flight or the unfinished portion of the tour—"

"I don't expect anything," I interrupted him. "I'll get home on my own."

"And what about your other luggage that is still on the bus at the pier in Sorrento?"

I had forgotten about that. "Oh, check it at the office on the pier. Someone will pick it up later today."

"I will have to ask you to sign a form releasing us from all responsibility."

"Sure, sure." I was getting tired of him. "Let's just wrap it up, shall we?"

Fran was less irritating but just as full of objections.

"You haven't even been to Florence and Venice yet!"

"I know, Fran. But I can go on my own before going home. Please don't worry about me."

"How can I help it? Anything could happen! Promise you'll have a letter waiting for me when I get home."

"I promise."

I made my farewells to the rest of the group, and when they all marched off up the hill toward the piazza, I did feel a qualm of dismay. Perhaps I was doing a very foolish thing. For a moment I was tempted to run after them and say that I had changed my mind, but of course I didn't.

I picked up my little bag and set out for the Casa Capriccio.

Eva unlocked the gate for me, looking disapproving. Here's another one who doesn't want me here, I thought unhappily.

"I vill show you your room," she murmured, and led me up to the second floor.

Fru Isacson had one of the big front bedrooms, and apparently Arne was occupying the one next to hers that Jan and Beth had been in before. I was shown to a room at the back that did not have an ocean view but looked down on the little flower garden behind the house. Beyond the garden rose a sheer rock wall, but it was an attractive room

with a beautiful tiled floor and its own lavatory.

"Does Fru Isacson want to see me now?" I asked.

"She is getting bath now. I vill let you know."

I put away the few things from my overnight bag and wandered down to the terrace. I would have to find out what to do about my other luggage. Arne was sitting at the white table drinking coffee. He stood up and bowed politely.

"Good morning, Miss Stewart. Would you care for some coffee?"

I came over to join him. "Thank you."

He poured another cup for me. I explained about my luggage, and he said, "I will have Emil —Eva's husband—go over for them. Are there many bags?"

"No, only one fairly large one and a middle-sized one; I had to buy that to hold all the stuff I was collecting."

"He can handle them all right, then."

"How do you get around here? You don't have a car, I suppose."

"One walks, mostly. There are buses and taxis available for longer trips. No, one cannot use a car here."

His attitude toward me was neither friendly

nor unfriendly—merely polite. All right, I thought, if that's the way he wants it, that's the way it will be.

In about an hour I was asked to go up to Fru Isacson, who greeted me eagerly. The nurse went out and left us alone.

"I'm so glad you decided to stay, Kim! I hope you won't regret it." She was on the chaise longue, carefully wrapped in a shawl with a satin comforter spread over her legs, although it was a warm day. She looked rested and alert.

She began at once to talk about her childhood on the farm, stopping now and then to ask me questions about my own childhood.

"I was nineteen," she told me, "when I met Ivar. He was on a tour of the United States for his newspaper, writing articles about the labor conditions. This was a long time ago, of course, before the first World War. He was actually a distant relative—our fathers were second cousins—and he came to the farm to visit us. It was love at first sight for both of us." Her eyes grew soft and happy, remembering.

"Did you go back to Sweden with him then?"

"Goodness, no. Young people were not so impetuous in those days. We corresponded for more

than a year; he wanted to get his career established before he married. A man did not marry then until he could afford to support a family, you know. But finally he sent for me and I went to Sweden, and I never regretted it for a moment, although at times I was quite homesick for America, of course."

It was not until our morning session was nearly over that she brought up the subject of greatest interest to me.

"About what happened to Beth," she said. "All they will tell me is that she slipped on those steps and fell. Just an unfortunate accident, they say. But the odd thing is, I had a similar experience myself about two years ago, shortly before I became ill."

"What happened?" I asked eagerly.

"I was never afraid of the grotto the way Beth was. I didn't feel the unpleasant vibrations she complained of. As a matter of fact, we bought the villa because of it. There are so few places on the island where you can reach the water easily, and both Ivar and I loved to swim. We wanted Capriccio because of the cove. Ivar kept a boat and liked to go out fishing on calm days."

"Do you believe there was ever a temple to Mithras there?" I asked.

"Oh, anything is possible on Capri. It is such a fantastic place. He was an interesting god, but rather obscure. It is hard to get much information about him. I like to think there was a temple here —but I am getting away from my story.

"After Ivar died I didn't sleep well; we were inseparable, and it was difficult for me to adjust to life without him. Sometimes I took sleeping pills, but I hated to get dependent on them. Now, of course, I get a nightly hypodermic and welcome it. At any rate, I was lying awake one night when I thought I heard the door to the tunnel creak open. It is a heavy door and hard to open or close quietly. We have always kept it locked.

"I lay there for a while listening, and thought I heard voices. Long ago there was a stream that wore a tunnel down through the rock into the sea. The people who lived here then, before the Romans came, enlarged the tunnel and carved steps in the rock down to the grotto. The legend is that they held their pagan rites in the temple, then carried the victim down the tunnel to the grotto where there was a sacrificial altar, and finished

him off there. Of course, it might have been only animals they killed—we can't be sure. When the Romans came they destroyed the temple and built a villa. When the Empire declined and Goths, Vandals, and Saracen pirates raided the island, that villa, too, was destroyed.

"It wasn't until after eighteen hundred and sixty, when the island finally became part of Italy, that the present villa was built over the ruins. There is a statue in the back garden—probably from the Roman era, but it might be older—that was dug up at that time. There were probably other things, but that's all that's left now. Dear me, I keep getting away from my story, don't I! Where was I?"

"You thought you heard voices in the grotto."

"Oh, yes, and, like Beth, I finally got up to investigate. We have always kept the door down there locked, because anyone could come into the cove by boat and come up through the tunnel, you see. I found the door standing open, and there was a light flickering around the bend, as though someone had lighted a torch in the grotto. I no longer heard the voices."

"Surely you didn't try to go down!" I exclaimed, with a mental image of this valiant little

woman standing at the head of a flight of dark stairs, peering into the unknown.

"No, I was more cautious than Beth. I called out, 'Who's there?' as loudly as I could, but nobody answered. I decided I'd better get Emil to investigate, and went to the quarters off the kitchen where he sleeps. After Ivar died, Eva moved upstairs to sleep in my dressing room. Emil wasn't in his room. I was beginning to be frightened, so I started back upstairs to get Eva when all the lights that I had turned on when I got up went off, leaving me in total darkness."

"Good heavens! You must have been terrified!"

"It was like a bad dream. I groped my way up the stairs screaming, 'Eva! Eva!' And then—"

"What happened?" I demanded when she paused for dramatic effect.

"Well, that's the silly part. The lights came on again, and Eva came out of the dressing room to find me, and she said I was having a nightmare. When I insisted on her going downstairs with me, she did, and the door to the tunnel was locked, and Emil came out of his room asking what all the commotion was about. I made him open the tunnel door and go down to investigate, but of course he found nothing; it was dark and quiet down

there. They both insisted it was a nightmare and put me back to bed. Eva gave me a sedative. The next morning I was convinced that it had been a nightmare—although it had certainly seemed as though I were awake—and thought no more about it. But when Beth and Jan came, and *she* started having dreams about the grotto—well, I wondered. And then her accident. It seems very strange that she should have had the same dream. Don't you think so, Kim?"

"Yes, it does. Did you ever tell Beth about your experience?"

"Yes, the first night they were here. Arne had come down from Rome to see them—he usually spent his weekends here, anyway—and Beth said something about the way the grotto made her feel, so I told about my experience. Perhaps that was a mistake; it may have started her having the dreams. But that last night—she said the tunnel door was open, and it doesn't seem likely that she would have unlocked and opened it herself in a dream—do you think, Kim?"

"I don't know. It seems more likely that somebody was really down there. But who—and why?"

"That's what bothers me. I have a feeling that

Arne knows more about it than he will tell me. I thought perhaps you could find something out."

"Fru Isacson, what about your servants? Do you trust them?"

"Emil and Eva? Of course I trust them. They have been with me for many years and are devoted. I don't know what I'd do without Eva."

"But if your dream were true and not fantasy, they would have to be mixed up in your deception, you know."

"I've thought of that," she admitted reluctantly. "That's why I was willing to accept it as a nightmare. I can't believe they'd lie to me and deceive me." She drew a long quivering sigh and leaned back among her pillows, looking suddenly exhausted.

"You must rest now," I said, getting up. "I'll call your nurse."

"Yes. But, Kim—" She reached out and took my hand. "I do want to know the truth, no matter what it is, no matter who is involved. Do you understand? I may be old and dying, but I'm tough. I can take it. And I want to know."

"If I find out, I'll tell you," I promised.

I went out, more curious than ever about the

mysterious grotto and anxious to see it for myself. The door to Arne's room was open, and I saw him seated by the windows at a desk, pecking away at a typewriter. He glanced up and saw me, then rose and came over to the door.

"I am working on a novel while I am here," he explained. "It's something I have been wanting to do—to take time off and concentrate on it, rather than work on it at odd moments."

"Well, I don't want to disturb you, Herr Isacson—"

"You aren't disturbing me. I'm grateful for a distraction at this point. And please call me Arne; we needn't be so formal."

I decided to take advantage of his friendly mood and said, "I would love to see that grotto I've heard so much about. Could you show it to me?"

"Why, yes. There is time for a swim before lunch. Why don't you put on your suit and meet me on the terrace?"

"That sounds wonderful!" I went on to my room in a state of excitement.

At last I would see the cave where strange things seemed to be happening!

CHAPTER FIVE

It was with a rapidly beating heart that I stood beside the heavy, ornately carved wooden door that led to the tunnel. Arne took down the big key that was kept on a hook beside the door and unlocked it. When he pulled the door open, I felt a clammy breath of air sweep up through the damp tunnel. It was dark down there, but a pale glimmer of light showed near the bottom. Very faintly came the sound of waves breaking on the rocks that lined the cove. It would be easy to have fantasies about such a place, I thought.

"When your eyes become accustomed to the gloom, you can see fairly well," Arne said, "but it is safer to use a flashlight." He switched one on that he had brought with him, and pointed it down the stairs. "There is a bracket at the bottom," he added, "where a torch can be placed,

but we seldom go down at night. I'll go first to light the way."

He started down and I followed cautiously. The passage was quite narrow, barely a yard wide in the beginning, but not very steep. Steps had been hacked out of the rock floor. Farther down it turned sharply and grew much steeper. The rock was slippery, too, from the water that trickled down the walls, and I could see how it would be easy to fall if one were not careful. I could see light at the bottom now from the cave entrance.

"It was here that Beth fell," Arne told me over his shoulder. "From where the tunnel bends, all the way to the bottom."

"It's a wonder she wasn't killed!" I exclaimed.

"Fortunately the floor of the cave is sand, not rock, or she probably would have been. But she did have a nasty concussion."

I groped my way down behind him, keeping one hand outstretched against the slimy wall. I wondered how the timid Beth had ever had the courage to come down here alone at night to investigate. I didn't think I could do it.

Finally we were standing in a large cave, where the welcome sunlight came slanting through a

broad opening. Here the ceiling was high and the air fresh, although cold, and I was shivering in my bathing suit. Although I was anxious to get out into the hot sunshine, I paused and looked around. So this was the mysterious grotto! It looked like an ordinary cave to me.

"There must have been some reason for historians to suspect this of being a Mithraic temple," I remarked. "What started the legend?"

"Come over here and I'll show you," Arne replied, going to a dark, shadowy corner of the cave. "There may have been an altar here once, but now only one thing remains to give any substance to the legend."

I stood beside him while he pointed the flashlight up to a place above our heads where no sunlight ever penetrated.

"There is a carving in the rock," he said. "Can you see it?"

I stood on tiptoe and peered at the rocky wall. I could barely make out a dim form carved there. It seemed to be the figure of a bull with long curving horns, and above his head was a stylized version of the sun with jagged rays extending from it.

"The sacred white bull!" I exclaimed.

"Well, a bull at any rate, and there is the sun, possibly representing Mithras, the god of light. Hence the legend. Plus the fact that fragments of a temple were unearthed from beneath the Roman ruins."

I reached up and traced the shape of the animal with reverent fingers.

"How old do you suppose it is?" I asked.

"Pre-Roman Empire. Over two thousand years, anyway."

I stood there in the dimness of the cave gazing up at the mysterious carving, trying to close off all awareness of the modern world, letting myself be carried back, back into the early mists of history, and a curious feeling swept over me, almost of panic, as though all those ancient emotions were stirring, pulsating, coming alive around me. I knew then what Beth had meant by vibrations, and why she feared the cave.

"You are shivering," Arne said. "It is too cold in here for you. Come out into the sunshine."

How welcome the glare and the heat of the sun felt when we came out onto the little beach in front of the cave. Great jagged rocks rose on all sides, but there was a narrow opening between them and a little expanse of coarse sand. A row-

boat with an outboard motor rested on one flat rock at the edge of the water.

I looked at the cliff that towered above us. The villa perched high above the sea, gleaming white in the sun, the bougainvillaea on the wall a bright patch of color. I could see the railing that ran along the outer edge of the street in front of the house, above that the balustrade of the terrace, and still higher the wrought-iron railing of the second-floor balcony. The cave extended back beneath the road. On our left, seemingly quite close, were the Faraglioni.

The sun and the water dazzled my eyes, not yet adjusted from the dark tunnel and cave. I took my sunglasses out of my beach bag and put them on, then spread my towel on the little patch of sand.

"I want to sit in the sun for a while and warm up," I said. "You go ahead and swim if you want to."

Arne went into the water and swam away from shore with strong strokes. I sat and watched him and thought about the people I had been traveling with, now speeding away toward Florence. Did I regret not going with them? I didn't think so. In spite of the fact that my connection with the Isacsons was tenuous and that they were, after all,

strangers, I still had the feeling that I was moving in a current of events outside my own will, that I was here to play a part not yet clear.

I thought about the cave, about the way I had felt by the carving. I didn't think there was anything supernatural about it, but it did seem as though in some curious way there remained a residue of ancient emotions, ancient terrors.

Arne dropped down beside me, panting and rubbing his face vigorously on a towel.

"The water is very refreshing today," he told me.

"I'm going in soon. I'm just lazy." I turned to look at him. "Arne, haven't you ever felt any—well, what Beth called vibrations in the cave?"

He hesitated. "It has a certain atmosphere," he replied, as though choosing his words carefully. "I can see why a sensitive person might be affected by it. My grandparents were never bothered by it, however."

"Except for your grandmother's nightmare. Or was it a nightmare?"

He didn't meet my eyes. "I don't know," he said. But Arne was a poor liar. I was sure then that he did know but would not tell me. Whatever the secret of the grotto might be, he was

mixed up in it. He seemed anxious to change the subject and began to question me about my life in America and my work there. In turn I asked him about his newspaper work in Rome, and he told me some amusing stories about it. He could be very charming and witty when he was not in one of his unfriendly moods. Finally he asked casually:

"Are you engaged, Kim? It is hard to believe that an attractive girl like you is still unattached."

"No, I'm not engaged," I told him. "Of course, I've been in and out of love a number of times during the last five years, but none of the relationships was really serious. I'm still waiting for the real thing to come along. What about you? Why haven't you married?"

He laughed a bit self-consciously and said, "I think it's because I didn't want marriage unless it could be like the one my grandparents had—Mamie and Ivar. Theirs was something very special. I always envied them."

"What about Jan and Beth? Do they have a good marriage?"

"It's too soon to tell, but I think it's a good one. They both love the farm, and it's important to want the same sort of life."

"But you prefer the city?"

He leaned on his elbow, sifting sand through his fingers with a contemplative frown.

"Sometimes I think so, but then again, sometimes I'd like to chuck it all and just work on my novel. I suppose I went into newspaper work because of my father and grandfather, but I'm still not sure that it's the career I want. If only I had an inexpensive place to live—"

"Couldn't you live here?" I asked.

His expression hardened. "Yes, if it were mine. But Farmor plans to leave it to Jan. Jan wants a place to bring Beth in the winter; she is not very strong, you know. He plans to rent it during the peak tourist months to get more income to put into the farm. They aren't having an easy time of it there financially, he claims. Our Grandfather Axel is getting old, and they need to hire more help but cannot afford it."

"If Jan is going to inherit the farm," I said, "it doesn't seem fair that he should get Capriccio, too."

Arne shrugged and gave a short, bitter laugh. "Oh, Jan has always been the favorite since we were children. Women have always doted on him, and men like him, too. When we are together, I

might as well be invisible. He seems to have convinced Farmor that he needs Capriccio—"

"But if Beth has taken such a dislike to it, she may refuse to come back here," I suggested.

"There is always that possibility, and I know that Farmor wants one of us here at least part of the time," he agreed slowly. "So I have not quite given up hope."

Something in the tone of his voice made me suddenly uneasy, but I didn't know why. I rose to my feet and said, "Well, if I'm going to get a swim before lunch, I'd better get on with it."

The cool water was wonderful, and I swam out at an angle toward the Faraglioni, which always drew me with a special magic of their own.

After I had showered and put on a dress, I wandered down the back stairway near my room and out into the little garden, where I had not yet explored. It was like an enclosed courtyard, with the sheer cliff at the back and high walls on both sides.

I gave a passing thought to the extreme technical and physical difficulty of building houses on the craggy little island, and went over to examine the statue that stood in the center of the garden. It

had a little pool at its feet, and gaily colored flowers grew around it. This must be, I thought, the statue Fru Isacson had mentioned that had been dug up on the site.

It was a life-sized statue of a boy carved from delicate, almost white marble. It seemed to be fairly well preserved for its age, although one of the boy's upraised arms was broken off at the elbow, and a few chips were visible here and there. The boy was naked except for some vines twined around his hips, and his remaining hand gripped the collar of a strange-looking animal crouched at his side.

I presumed it was a dog, but it was certainly no breed I had ever encountered or would want to! It was hairless and thin, supple, almost boneless-looking, with a long tail and a head so narrow and pointed that it almost appeared to be an extension of the long neck; all in all, a curiously disturbing and distasteful creature.

I walked around to study the boy's face, and when I looked at it a thrill that was half attraction, half revulsion went through me. It was a beautiful face in the traditional Greek style, and the eyes were blank, but there was something in

the faint smile on the perfect lips and in the slant of the blind eyes that suggested a being both inhuman and unspeakably evil.

When I finally turned away from my fascinated examination of the statue, I noticed for the first time that a man was working on the flowers growing along one of the walls. I had not seen him before, and thought that he must be Eva's husband, Emil. He was small and slight with receding brown hair, a deeply lined and weathered face, and protuberant ears. He looked up when I approached, and I was struck by the gentle, rather sad expression in his hazel eyes. He smiled shyly and nodded his head in greeting.

I smiled back. "Hello! Are you Emil Lindgren?"

"Emil does not speak English," Arne said behind me, and I turned to see him standing by the statue. "Eva knows a little, because Farmor makes her speak it at times. We all get it in school, you know, but it did not seem to take with Emil. Well, lunch is ready, if you would care to join me on the terrace."

I walked through the house with him and out to the white table, where Eva was placing a bowl

of seafood salad. I could not get the statue out of my mind.

"Do you know anything at all about that statue, Arne?" I asked. "It is such a strange thing."

"All I know is that it is probably a Greek work from the fourth century B.C. It has always made me rather uncomfortable. The only other statue I have seen with such an evil face is one of Carl Milles's, a man on horseback."

"And that awful animal! Are you sure that pair doesn't wander around the villa on moonlit nights?"

"Perhaps they do." Arne smiled. "Perhaps they go down to the grotto and perform—"

"Oh, stop it!" I cried, sorry that I had created the fantasy. "Do you want to give me nightmares like Beth's?"

"They may come, anyway," he replied. "This is a strange, enchanted island filled with dark forces from the past." He had an odd expression in his eyes, almost as though he were measuring me for some sort of reaction, and it was then that the suspicion began to take shape in my mind, and a number of little facts I had gathered seemed to click into place.

Arne wanted the Casa Capriccio, but his younger brother, whom everyone seemed to prefer, had been selected to inherit it. But if that brother, whose wife was timid about "vibrations" in ancient places, could be frightened enough about her safety, or if she would refuse to live here—

Yes, that could explain a great deal. Arne had been here the evening Fru Isacson had told them of her dream, and from Beth's reaction he might have formed his plan. He was here often enough to have managed a few disturbances in the grotto, enough to get Beth's imagination working. And her fall—had that been purely an accident? In spite of the heat of the sun, I suddenly felt cold. Did he want the villa enough to commit a murder?

But why didn't he want me there? Jan and Beth had already been driven away. Was there something he was afraid I might discover if I stayed here and poked around?

"What is the matter, Kim?" he asked. "You look so frightened."

I tried to smile and turned my eyes from his.

"I was thinking of the statue," I murmured.

But I could not deny the question that arose in my mind: Was it dangerous for me to stay there? Would I be the next one that had to be frightened away?

CHAPTER SIX

That afternoon during my session with Fru Isacson, she had me read to her from some magazines she had ordered from the United States. She seemed rather tired, not so inclined to reminisce as she had earlier in the day. Before I left she brought the subject around to the grotto again.

"How did you feel about our mysterious grotto?" she asked, her keen old eyes searching my face.

"It does seem to have an atmosphere of—of antiquity," I replied. "But nothing that would give me nightmares." That reminded me of my suspicions of her grandson. "Fru Isacson," I said cautiously, "do you think that Arne resents your leaving the villa to his brother?"

She frowned. "Has he been talking about it? I

don't think 'resents' is quite the word, but I think he was rather hurt, and I am sorry."

"He told me that he would like to live here and work on his novel."

"I know. And I'll tell you something he doesn't know, Kim—I had intended to leave Capriccio to him, and also the trust fund that goes with it. I wanted him to have it—I still do—because he really loves it here. Jan's interest is financially motivated. I am only leaving it to Jan because my son, Karl, insists on it. He's afraid that if I leave it to Arne, he'll quit the newspaper, and Karl doesn't want that to happen. He says that Arne is very good at his job and may become editor when Karl retires."

"Don't you think that Arne should be allowed to make his own decisions?"

She made a wry face. "Yes, but you don't know Karl. He is a very forceful man. Originally the villa was to go to him, but he didn't want it. He'll never leave Sweden. So he insisted that I leave it to Jan, and that's the way it stands."

"Arne thinks you prefer Jan to him."

"That isn't true. I'm afraid Arne has sort of a complex about his brother because Jan was always so popular, while Arne kept in the background.

Arne is quiet and bookish, and Jan loves sports and being with people. Jan is charming and I adore him, but in a way I think I love Arne more. He has more depth and sensitivity."

"But if Jan can't persuade Beth to come back here, will you change your will?" I persisted.

"I'll have to wait until Karl comes down again. I can't do it without his knowledge or consent, but if he will agree, I will certainly change it. I don't want Capriccio rented or sold to strangers."

"Parents should never try to arrange their children's lives," I said firmly.

Her eyes twinkled. "But they do, Kim, they always do try!" She put her hand on my arm. "You seem to be fighting hard to get Arne what he wants! You aren't falling in love with him, are you?"

I flushed. "It isn't that at all," I protested. "It just doesn't seem fair that Jan should get both the farm and your villa. I know it isn't any of my business—"

"Oh, I want you to make Capriccio your business, Kim. That's why I asked you to stay. I know that things aren't right here, and I wanted a fresh viewpoint."

I went away, completely confused by my own

attitude. If my suspicions of Arne were correct, then he certainly did not deserve to inherit Capriccio, so why was I trying to help him? When the mind goes one way and sentiment another, logic seems to go right out the window!

I felt the need to get away from the villa for a while to sort out my feelings, so I decided to walk into town to mail the letter I had written to my parents explaining why I wouldn't return with the tour. The afternoon sun was hot on my shoulders as I walked up the hill toward the piazza, but there was a cooling breeze from the sea.

The piazza never seemed quite real to me. It looked exactly like a Hollywood set, and when I sat at one of the little sidewalk tables, I always expected to see a gaily costumed chorus line come dancing and singing out of one of the narrow streets that radiated out of it. Besides the shops and sidewalk cafes, there was a church and belfry set off by itself, as so many are in Europe.

During my stay in Italy I had developed a passion for the drink they call "capuccino," which, from what I was able to observe, was made by combining coffee and milk under pressure. I drank it whenever possible, and I now decided to treat myself to a cup before returning to the villa.

I found a seat at a sidewalk table on the piazza and ordered my capuccino. It was very pleasant to sit there amid such colorful surroundings, and I sipped my drink and stared at the other tourists thronging past. I thought about Capriccio.

Perhaps I was wrong about Arne, I told myself. I sincerely hoped so. I had liked him so much in the beginning, before the nagging little doubts began to intrude, even though he hadn't wanted me at the villa. Well, it was too soon to form any definite conclusions. My father always claimed that if the Olympics gave a gold medal for jumping to conclusions, I would win it with ease. I told myself that I must not be guilty of that now, but must observe and judge with care—

Someone was looking at me. I had always been able to sense that, and the feeling was so strong now that I turned my head without even thinking about it—to find myself gazing into the clear brown eyes of the most attractive young man I had ever seen.

His wavy brown hair—cut much shorter than most young men were wearing it that summer—was combed neatly back from a side part. His smooth, well-tanned skin had a sort of golden glow, and his dark eyes were intelligent and

friendly. He was quite slender, and casually attired in a sweater and shorts, with beautifully shaped hands and almost classically perfect features. He held a book in one hand, and there was a cup of coffee and a camera on the table beside him. A tourist, surely, and for some reason I was almost certain that he was an American.

For a moment I had the queer feeling that he was only a mirage I had conjured up, one of the fantasies young unattached women are prone to. He was almost too perfect. When he saw me staring at him, he gave me a shy, friendly smile and returned to a perusal of the book, which seemed to be an Italian grammar. I went back to sipping my capuccino, trying not to look at him but not succeeding too well.

Why, I wondered indignantly, out of all the men who tried to pick me up when I wandered around alone, did the one I wanted to try have to be so reticent?

In a few minutes he glanced at his watch, closed the book, stood up, and walked rapidly away without so much as another glance in my direction. He moved with a lithe grace, and I stared after him regretfully. Then my eyes went to the table he had vacated, and there, reposing neatly beside

the empty cup, was the camera, an expensive-looking affair in a black leather case.

Without a moment's hesitation I rose, picked up the camera, and hurried off in the direction he had taken. He had turned down one of the narrow side streets and was already out of sight, but I kept going, almost running, looking from side to side to make sure he hadn't gone into one of the shops. I had almost given up hope of finding him when suddenly there he was beside a fruit stall, looking over the wares.

"I beg your pardon," I said breathlessly at his elbow, "but I believe this is your camera."

He turned in surprise, then recognition came into his eyes and he smiled.

"Good Lord, so it is!" he exclaimed. "How do you like that! The thing set me back two months' salary, and I just walked away from it. I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"That's all right," I replied.

He swung the camera by its strap and regarded me with a whimsical expression. "You know," he said, "I was right: you do look like a young Doris Day!"

Nobody had told me that since I had left the States.

"Do you really think so?" I said idiotically.

"Yes, I do." He held out his hand. "My name is Peter Mason."

"I'm Kim Stewart." We shook hands and smiled at each other.

"That's a prettier name than Doris Day. Where are you from?"

"Pittsburgh."

"I'm from Seattle. Are you going to be here long?"

"For the summer, I think. I have a position as companion to an elderly lady."

"Hey, that's wonderful! You know, I wanted awfully to speak to you back there at the cafe, but I figured, well, you were just a tourist passing through and would probably be gone tomorrow. I'm staying, too."

"Do you have a job here?"

"No such luck. I'm a teacher—geography—and I try to spend the summers in different countries, studying the language, taking slides, so I can make it more interesting for the kids."

"I'm a teacher, too."

"You are? I took you for a college student. You know, I was just standing here trying to decide whether to eat out or pick up a few items and fix

something in my room. You've certainly earned a reward, so how about letting me take you to dinner? I can't afford anyplace fancy, but I know a little cafe that serves the best *zuppa e frittura di pesce* you ever ate!"

"It sounds delicious," I said, "whatever it is, but this is my first day here, and I think I'd better get back to the villa."

"It's just fried fish. Another day, then?"

"Yes, I'd like that."

"Fine. At least let me walk you home. Where are you staying?"

"It's called the Casa Capriccio. A Swedish family that an old friend of mine married into owns it now."

We started walking back up the street toward the square, since the road I had to take couldn't be reached from where we were. He chatted away happily about his school and his home back in Seattle. I thought I had never met such a cheerful, uncomplicated young man. He told me that he was twenty-five, an only child. When we were nearly to the villa, he said:

"Tell me about this place where you are staying. What sort of people are they?"

"There are only Fru Isacson," I replied, "a dear

old lady who is dying, and her grandson Arne, who has come to stay with her. Then there is a nurse, who is only there during the day, and a pair of servants they brought from Sweden."

He frowned in mock severity. "This Arne—I don't think I like the sound of him. Is he young, handsome, unmarried?"

I laughed. "Yes, he is fairly young, around thirty, and quite nice-looking and certainly unmarried, but I'm afraid he doesn't like me. He did his best to keep me from taking the position there."

"Good Lord, then he must be some kind of a nut!"

"Not really, but his sister-in-law, my old friend, was hurt there, and he seems to think something might happen to me."

"What happened to your friend?"

I found myself telling him the story of the grotto, but not, of course, my suspicions of Arne.

"How exciting!" he exclaimed. "How do you feel about the place?"

"Oh, it has a certain aura—I can understand why they call it the mysterious grotto—but it doesn't frighten me. The only thing in the villa that really bothers me is the statue in the garden.

It has such an evil face, and the dog beside the figure of the boy is such a revolting creature. But apparently it didn't bother Beth, she was only afraid of the cave."

"We are all frightened by different sorts of things," he said thoughtfully. "It's not the thing in itself, but the chord it strikes in our soul—that is composed of all the experiences and traumas of our lifetime."

"Yes," I agreed, "that must be it."

By now we were standing at the bottom of the flight of stairs leading up to the villa, and Peter took my hand.

"Kim, I will see you again, won't I?"

"I don't see why not, if you want to."

"I want to very much. Will you meet me tomorrow at the same time at the cafe?"

"All right, unless something happens to tie me up here."

"I'll be waiting. And thank you again for rescuing my camera!" He lifted my hand to his lips. "*Arrivederci*—and watch out for that Swede! They're a tricky lot!"

I laughed and ran up the steps to the inner gate of the villa. Could this be it? I asked myself while I waited for Eva to open the gate. The moment

every girl dreams of—the right time, the right place, the right man? It almost seemed too good to be true.

Arne and I had dinner on the terrace, and my inner glow must have shown through, because he commented, "You are looking very happy tonight, Kim."

"I feel happy," I replied. "It is all so lovely here." I didn't want to tell him about Peter. What I did outside the villa was my own business, and anyway, I had the feeling he wouldn't approve.

Darkness descended over the Mediterranean, and lights began to twinkle along the mountainside that was visible from the villa. The scent of exotic flowers permeated the air. It was the most romantic night I had ever experienced, but Arne excused himself and went to his room, where I could hear the intermittent tapping of his typewriter. Obviously he had no intention of treating me as anything other than his grandmother's companion, someone in whom he had not the slightest interest. Well, that was all right with me!

I went to my room thinking dreamily of Peter—how nice, how unspoiled he was. In spite of his rare good looks he didn't seem to have any vanity, or even to be aware of them. Suddenly, for no rea-

son, my eyes filled with tears. How strange it all was! My sense of destiny grew stronger, and I felt that my whole uneventful lifetime had been building up to this summer.

It had been a long day, and I had not slept well the night before. Now I realized that I was very tired. I took a bath, selected one of the paperback mysteries Fran had passed on to me, and got into bed. I hadn't read very long before a wave of drowsiness threatened to overwhelm me, and I turned off the light.

For several hours I slept soundly. When I awoke, the moon was up, flooding the room with its magical silver light. A breeze was blowing through my open windows, and shadows from the tall cypresses danced like wraiths across the floor. What had awakened me? A noise of some sort? I thought, of course, of the grotto, and wondered if I were to be treated to a demonstration of its mysteries.

I lay listening with a pounding heart but heard no sound from the heavy door in the hallway below. But there was something out in the garden. It sounded like the low whine of a dog. I got out of bed and went to the window. Even with the bright moonlight the garden was too full of trees

and dancing shadows to make out anything distinctly.

I could just barely see the dark form of the statue in the center of the garden, and as I peered at it I thought I saw a darker shadow detach itself from the others around the base and glide away into the darkness below the wall. Again, quite distinctly, I heard the low, menacing snarl of some animal.

But there were no dogs at Capriccio, and no way for any to get in. No dogs—except, of course, the horrid creature of the statue.

It was very quiet in the garden now; nothing moved but the shifting shadows of the cypress trees. Whatever I had heard had gone. Trembling, I went back to my bed. It was then that I heard, very faintly, the closing of a massive door.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It had been Arne, of course, I decided. He knew how I felt about the statue and was using that knowledge to frighten me, just as he had used Beth's fear of the cave to drive her away. But why? Why me? Was he still up to something here, something that wasn't finished and that he was afraid I would find out about?

I tossed fitfully the rest of the night and didn't fall asleep again until dawn. I awoke with a determination to see it through no matter what he might do.

I had breakfast alone on the terrace, served by a silent, withdrawn Eva. When I inquired about Arne, she replied in her hesitant English that he had risen very early and taken the boat out to fish.

Was he ashamed to face me, I wondered, after such a shameful trick? My morning session with

Fru Isacson was much the same as before. She greeted me cheerfully from the chaise longue and had me finish reading the story I had started the afternoon before.

"My eyes tire so quickly now," she told me, "and I have grown too weak to hold a magazine. It is a dreadful thing when the body that has served you faithfully for many years finally betrays you."

"We all come to it in time," I replied, "and many much sooner than you. I suppose it is Nature's way of planned obsolescence."

I was pleased that I could make her laugh. "Yes, Kim. And I don't really mind now that Ivar is gone. I don't want to keep him waiting too long. I just wish it wouldn't drag out so."

I looked out at the Faraglioni, magnificent in the morning sunshine.

"You wouldn't want to leave all this any sooner than necessary," I said gently, "no matter how hard it is."

"Oh, I will never leave it!" she said gaily. "Part of me will always be floating around out there, admiring the view!"

The nurse came in then and I had to leave. When I reached Arne's door, I hesitated. No one

seemed to be around. He had not come back from his fishing trip, and Eva had gone out to do her morning marketing. I had seen her going out the front gate with a big basket. I didn't relish the idea of snooping, but I consoled myself with the thought that I had orders from the owner of the villa to do just that! Besides, if Arne were going to frighten me as he had the night before, he deserved it.

I cautiously opened his door and went in. His room was very much like his grandmother's, except that instead of a chaise longue by the windows, Arne had a table containing his typewriter and an untidy pile of papers.

Curious as to what sort of a writer he was, I went over to the table and picked up the top sheet of paper. Then I made a face at my own stupidity; it was in Swedish, of course!

I began to look around the room quite aimlessly, not knowing what I was looking for; opening and closing drawers, peering into the big wardrobe where a few suits were hanging neatly. Over the back of one chair hung the white pullover jersey he had been wearing the day before, the only thing out of place. He was really surprisingly tidy for a man, except for his desk.

My brother's room always looked as though several hurricanes had just passed through.

I picked up the jersey without realizing what I was doing and held it against my face. Then I threw it down, annoyed with myself. What had got into me, anyway? I didn't even like the man, so why should I go nuzzling his clothes?

Something had fallen out of the breast pocket of the jersey while I was fondling it; a white slip of paper was lying on the chair. I picked it up and glanced at it. There was nothing on it but what seemed to be a date—*Juli* 16. *Juli* was Swedish for July, I presumed. Did it mean anything? Probably not, and yet somebody had taken the trouble to write it down. I studied the piece of paper. It was the same size as the pad I had seen beside the telephone in the hall. Yes, it had probably come from there. Someone had jotted it down during a telephone conversation. Was it Arne's writing?

I took it over to the table to check with some handwritten notes lying there. No, it was definitely not Arne's writing. His was small and neat; this was loose and sprawly. Even if he were jotting something down in a hurry, Arne's writing would never look like that. Whose, then? Eva's or Emil's? I put the paper carefully back in the pocket. It

probably didn't mean anything—most likely some appointment that one of the servants had taken for him. But I would keep it in mind all the same. The sixteenth. This was the eighth. So whatever it was, it was still more than a week off.

There was obviously nothing more to be found in his room unless it had been hidden, in which case I wasn't about to rip up the mattress or pry up tiles in the floor to find it. Whatever Arne was up to, he hadn't left any clues lying around.

I returned to my own room and, since it was a hot day, decided to go for a swim. Quickly I changed into my bathing suit and went downstairs. Since Arne was out in the boat, I expected the door to the tunnel to be unlocked. I had barely got it open when I saw him coming up the stairs. He carried a string of fish in one hand.

"Hullo!" I said cheerfully. "Looks like you had a successful trip."

He stepped out into the hall beside me and glanced down at the fish as though he had never seen them before and wondered what they were doing there.

"Oh," he said. "Yes. Are you going to swim? You shouldn't do it alone. Wait until I give these

to Eva, and I'll join you." He was already wearing his bathing trunks.

I waited by the door until he returned from the kitchen, and we went down the damp stairs together.

"Aren't you hungry?" I asked. "Don't you want something to eat first?"

"No, I carried a thermos of coffee and some sandwiches in the boat."

When we got out into the sunshine, Arne was looking at my face intently. "Did you sleep all right, Kim?" he asked. "You look tired."

Aha! I thought. So he was curious to know if his efforts had frightened me. Well, I had no intention of playing his little game, and wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing I had even heard anything.

"Oh, I slept fine," I assured him blandly. "I guess I'm not the nervous type. You don't look too good yourself," I counterattacked.

It was quite true. In spite of his fishing trip, which should have relaxed him, he looked nervous and jumpy. Serves him right, I thought.

"I'm all right," he said briefly, and went into the water.

I sat on my towel watching him, more deter-

mined than ever now to expose him and save Beth and Jan's inheritance from this scheming young man. All my sympathy for him had vanished after the fright he had given me the night before. He certainly didn't deserve the villa. The more I thought about it, the angrier I became.

He came out in a few minutes and sat on a nearby rock.

"How's the novel going?" I asked sweetly.

He made a wry face. "Not so good. I find myself making up all sorts of excuses to keep me away from my typewriter. Like going fishing. *Herre Gud,* I don't even like to fish!"

I had my swim and we sunned a while, then went up to dress for lunch.

When I had finished my afternoon session with Fru Isacson, I changed into my most becoming flowered shift and started off for the piazza, excited at the thought of seeing Peter again. He was waiting for me at the same table and rose with an eager smile when I approached.

"Kim! How pretty you look today!" He took my hand and held it, looking down into my eyes. He was even better-looking than I remembered. "Do you want some capuccino?"

"It's my secret passion," I told him.

"Lucky capuccino! I wish I were!"

I laughed. "Well, I'd hardly keep you a secret," I said.

He was very easy to talk to, and I found myself chatting away while we sipped our drinks, practically giving him my life history. The only thing I didn't talk about was my suspicion of Arne; it didn't seem right to discuss him with someone who was, after all, a stranger. Peter was very informative, too, telling me more about the beautiful city where he had grown up, and about his mother and father, who had, he confessed with a wry grin, spoiled him rotten.

"You know how it is with an only child," he said.

I could well imagine that this handsome, charming boy was indeed the apple of his parents' eye! But if he had been spoiled, I could see no evidence of it. He talked about his work with a boy scout troop and various other worthy activities.

There had to be a flaw somewhere, I mused. Nobody could be that perfect! And yet, when I talked about myself to him, I realized I was making myself sound just about as good. When you meet someone who attracts you strongly, it is

only human to try to give the best possible impression.

"Is there anything here I ought to see while I'm on Capri?" I asked.

He considered. "There are dozens of things, but you've probably seen the main ones. The Blue Grotto, for instance."

"Yes, the tour went there the first day and also took us on a cruise around the island."

"Did you get up to Anacapri?"

"No. What's there?"

"Many interesting things. It's another little town, you know, and used to be a fierce rival of Capri. There are some good ruins, tremendous views, and, of course, the Villa San Michele. I'm surprised your Swedish friend hasn't insisted on your seeing that."

"My Swedish friend," I replied dryly, "couldn't care less what I see or don't see on the island."

"He must be a dull clod. I've heard that Swedish men are difficult, but that one must be impossible!"

For some reason that annoyed me. "On the contrary," I said, "Arne is intelligent and talented. He just isn't interested in me."

"I suppose I ought to be grateful to him for

giving me a clear field!" Peter grinned. "How about it? Shall we go up to Anacapri? We can get a bus here at the piazza."

"What is that place San Michele you mentioned?"

"It was built by a Swedish doctor, Axel Munthe, on the site of an ancient Roman palace. A lot of old Roman stuff was dug up during the construction, and he has it on display in the villa. He wrote a book about it—*The Story of San Michele.*"

"Oh, yes! I've heard of it."

"There's also an old tower erected in fourteen hundred—a fortress built by Carthusian monks—if you like medieval architecture."

"It sounds fascinating," I said. "Okay, let's go up and see the villa."

Munthe's villa was charming with its old-fashioned atmosphere, a bit of rural Sweden—except for the Italian antiques—transferred to a mountaintop on Capri. Peter showed me what was called the "wishing table"—a lovely old Roman thing dug from the ruins. He showed me how to stand and place my hand on it in the proper manner, and said that whatever I wished for could come true.

"Guaranteed?" I asked.

"Oh, an absolute guarantee."

"Have you tried it? Did your wish come true?"

He laughed. "Not yet, but things are beginning to look up!"

I stood beside it with my hand resting on its worn surface and closed my eyes. What did I really want more than anything in the world?

I wish, I said silently, that this summer I will find my own true love! Wasn't that the only wish possible for an unattached girl to make on a beautiful sunny day in the most romantic place in the world?

When we left the villa and were browsing along the row of shops that lined the walk between it and the piazza of Anacapri, I noticed an insignificant-looking man in a wrinkled brown suit standing a few feet away. He wouldn't have caught my attention at all if it hadn't been for his bushy black moustache. There was something familiar about that moustache. I frowned, trying to remember, then recalled that he had been sitting in the cafe a few tables away while we had our capuccino. When he saw me looking at him, he turned and strolled away. He certainly didn't look like a tourist.

"Peter," I said, "I know it's silly, but I would have sworn that man was following us!"

Peter turned sharply and looked in the direction I indicated, but the man had disappeared.

"Following us? Why on earth would anyone do that, Kim? Are you an international spy or something?"

"No, but—" I caught myself abruptly. Surely Arne wouldn't go so far as to have me followed—would he? What on earth could be his game?

"But what, Kim?"

"Nothing," I said. "I'm starting to imagine things, I guess, like Beth."

More than anything I wanted to tell Peter about my suspicions, but still I hesitated. I couldn't involve him in it—not yet, anyway. Suddenly the sun seemed a little dimmer.

"I'd better be getting back," I said.

When we left the bus at the square in Capri, Peter said, "Tomorrow—same time, same station?"

"All right, Peter."

"Maybe you could stay and have dinner with me?"

"That would be nice."

I got back to Capriccio just as Eva was setting the table for dinner.

Arne was sitting on the terrace, and he said, "Where have you been, Kim? I was getting worried about you."

"I didn't know that I was supposed to report my outside activities to you," I replied haughtily.

"Of course not. But you didn't say that you wouldn't be home to dinner, and I wondered—"

"I was out sightseeing, as a matter of fact. I went to see San Michele."

"If you had told me you wanted to go there, I would have taken you."

"I'm not in the habit of asking favors from my employers."

"*Herre Gud,* I'm not your employer! I don't know what you're being so huffy about, Kim. I merely inquired—"

"All right. And I told you." Actually, I didn't know why I was angry, either. But I was. I realized that it was ridiculous to associate Arne with the man with the moustache. Of course he wasn't paying him to follow me around!

Darkness fell again, another night of star-spangled skies and perfumed breezes. I felt a vague restlessness, a longing for something I could not name. When I went to bed I was uncomfortably aware of the mysterious grotto beneath the

villa, of the dark, winding tunnel, of the strange creatures in the garden below my windows.

I wondered if I, too, would begin to have nightmares of something crawling up the stairs from the cave. . . .

I read until the lights blurred before my eyes. Why, I wondered, did I fight the desire to sleep? It was almost as though I knew that somewhere something was waiting, waiting until I was no longer on my guard—

Impatiently I shut the book and turned off the bedside lamp. If this kept up, I would soon be as neurotic as Beth. Or perhaps she hadn't been neurotic at all; perhaps there really *was* something!

I slept. This time I was awakened by a touch, something light as gossamer stroking my face and throat. I opened my eyes. Again the shifting shadows danced crazily across the floor and along the walls, only this time there was something more, something standing at the foot of my bed.

I saw it clearly then, a face that seemed to drift through the air. It had a dim radiance of its own, and I saw the slanting eyes gazing at me, the lips smiling faintly with the suggestion of unspeakable evil.

It was the face of the statue in the garden.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Of course, at that point all my resolutions to keep quiet about anything that happened to me at Capriccio vanished in an instant. I had never been so terrified in my entire life. With a loud scream I jumped out of bed and grabbed my robe, flung open the door, tore down the hall to Arne's room, and dashed inside without bothering to knock. It simply didn't occur to me then that he might be the instigator of my phantom.

I threw myself down on his bed, clutching at his recumbent form and shouting his name. He sat up, fumbled for the light switch of his lamp, and turned it on. Then he stared at me with eyes bleary from sleep, his fair hair tousled like a little boy's, and muttered a few surprised words in Swedish.

"It was the statue!" I gasped. "I saw its face—coming at me in the moonlight!"

He stared at me for a moment, then leaped out of bed and ran out of the room. I followed him with a wildly beating heart, not wanting to be left alone. He turned my light on and began to search the room, but there was nothing out of the ordinary.

"Are you sure you weren't dreaming, Kim?" he asked finally.

I advanced a few steps into the room. "Certainly not! I was awakened by something touching my face, and then I saw it—that—that Thing! It was horrible!"

I was shivering, and he came over and put his arms around me protectively. "Well, it's gone now, Kim. Nothing is going to hurt you."

"But what was it?" I wailed. "It must have come out of the garden—"

"No, Kim. The statue is not alive; it cannot attack you. You have been brooding too much about this place, like Beth—"

I pulled away angrily. "It was not my imagination!"

A sound from the doorway made us both look up. Eva and Emil were standing there regarding

us anxiously. Emil asked a question and Arne replied, apparently explaining that I had had a nightmare. Eva nodded and went back to Fru Isacson's room, but Emil stood there for a few more minutes before going downstairs, and I saw him exchange a curious, yet somehow familiar look with Arne, a look I recognized as being the we'll-talk-about-it-later look often used by parents in front of their offspring. Arne put his hand on the man's shoulder for a moment in what appeared to be a gesture of reassurance, then Emil went away.

It seemed very obvious to me that both men knew something about my apparition—something they had no intention of telling me.

Arne looked at me uncertainly. "Do you think you will be all right now?" he asked.

"I would be a lot better off if you would explain what is going on around here," I replied coldly.

"I warned you that it might not be—pleasant for you here. It is still not too late for you to rejoin your tour."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you!" I retorted. "You didn't want me here, and you'd do anything to get rid of me. Well, it won't work, Herr Isac-

son! Here I am, and here I stay, as long as your grandmother wants me—even if all the demons of hell come trooping out of your old grotto!"

He gave me his sad, wry little smile. "Oh, Kim," was all he said, then he turned and left me.

I was so angry that I wasn't even frightened any more—at least not quite so badly frightened. I shut my door and propped a chair against the knob, since it had no lock, closed and locked my windows in spite of the warm night, and went back to bed. I even went to sleep after an hour or so.

In the morning before breakfast I went out to the garden and examined the statue, not that I expected to find anything. The boy and his dog looked as revolting as ever, but they were only marble, and I really couldn't believe they had been running around the night before. Someone was trying to frighten me off, that was all. And Arne knew all about it; in fact, he had probably put somebody up to it—Emil, no doubt. But why had Emil looked so distressed?

Completely baffled, I went out to the terrace for breakfast. Arne was waiting, and he spoke to me with grave courtesy.

"I hope you were able to get some rest after last night's disturbance," he said.

"I'm quite all right," I assured him, and for the rest of the meal we discussed only the most casual subjects.

When I went up for my morning session with Fru Isacson, Eva stopped me at the door.

"She is not good today," she told me. "Nurse is with her now. Maybe after lunch she see you."

"I hope I didn't disturb her last night," I said with concern.

"No, she not wake up. It is like this—some days good, some days not so good."

I started down the stairs again, wondering what to do with my free time. When I reached the landing, I saw Arne standing in the hall talking on the telephone. Something in the guarded tone of his voice made me pause and watch him. I could hear just enough to know that he was speaking Italian. It's difficult, I thought with a sigh, to play detective when people keep speaking languages I can't understand.

He only spoke a few sentences, then replaced the receiver and started toward the door. He hadn't seen me, and on an impulse I ran down the

remaining stairs and looked to see where he was going. He was just opening the gate.

Well, I thought, why not follow him? Two can play at his game! I was free for the morning, and it wouldn't hurt to see what he was up to. Of course, I had never tried to tail anyone before, but perhaps I could manage it.

The gate had the sort of lock that could be opened from the inside, but it required a key to be opened from the outside when the catch was on. Anyone wanting access into the villa either would have to have a key or would have to climb over the walls—no simple matter, since they were high and smooth.

I waited until Arne went out the gate at the bottom of the steps; then I followed. He strode purposefully off toward town, never looking back, so it was easy to keep him in sight yet maintain a safe distance between us. I realized he might well be going on some mundane errand, but I was rather enjoying myself. I thought at first that he was headed for the square, but before he reached it he turned off into one of the narrow, winding alleys that cropped up everywhere.

It was a bit more difficult now to keep him in sight without being seen, but I kept close to the

shops on one side, edging along, pretending to look at the wares in case he glanced back. Finally he stopped in the doorway of a little china shop, and I could see that he was talking to someone. I had to find out to whom he was talking, or my trip would be in vain, so I worked my way closer, keeping behind the thronging tourists until I was nearly up to the china shop.

Arne seemed to be much too busy talking to the person he had met to pay any attention to anything around him. I crossed the street so that I could see the person beyond Arne in the doorway. When I saw who it was, I gave an angry gasp and my heart began to pound. It was the man with the bushy moustache!

I could no longer doubt that Arne was having me followed, or that he was involved in some nefarious scheme. I had been hoping all along to be proved wrong, but that was out of the question now. I realized that he must know all about my meetings with Peter. But why? Why was he going to so much trouble over me, who could not possibly be any threat to him?

Arne's face was stern and angry, and from the gestures the other man was making, I could see that he was trying to calm him, to make him agree

to something. They were, of course, speaking Italian. Apparently the man succeeded, because finally Arne raised his hands in a gesture of submission and turned away. He looked right at me, but he was still so preoccupied with whatever he had been arguing about that he didn't see me.

I hastily ducked into the shop I had been standing in front of so that the man with the moustache wouldn't see me. Arne strode off down the street, but the other man remained in the doorway a little longer, lighting a cigar, looking up and down the street, before he, too, left. The woman who worked in the little shop I had entered approached me eagerly with one of the dreadful Capri bags and began tugging on my arm, trying to get my attention.

If I had had my purse with me, I would probably have bought the thing just to get away from her, but I had no money and had to talk my way out. She followed me into the street, still waving the thing in my face. I walked slowly homeward, my spirits dragging in the dust.

I couldn't begin to understand what it was all about. Obviously there was more to it than Arne's efforts to become the heir to the villa. But none of it made the slightest sense to me now. At that mo-

ment I longed to do just as he had suggested—rejoin my tour. They would be reaching Venice today, I recalled, and would stay there for three days. It would be easy enough to reach them. But I had told Arne that nothing would drive me away, and I was too proud to admit defeat.

I wondered whether I should confront Arne with what I had discovered and demand an explanation. No, I really didn't have that much to go on, and he could probably think up several excuses. It would be better to go on as before until I learned more about the situation. If the date on the paper in his pocket meant anything—and I had a strong hunch it did—the whole affair would probably come to a climax then, anyway. I would wait and see.

I wanted desperately to see Peter, to tell him all of it and receive his sympathy and advice. He was the only wholesome, sane part of all this crazy business. But still, I reflected, it would not be fair to get him involved in it. I must not forget what had happened to Beth. Peter would no doubt want to help me, and how could I forgive myself if anything happened to him because of me? No, I had to keep him out of it.

I thought about the phantom at the foot of my

bed. Even in daylight I shivered at the memory of that ghastly face with its evil smile. How had that trick been managed? For it *had* to be a trick. No matter how full of mysterious auras the villa might be, that statue hadn't really been in my room! It had to fit in somewhere; it had to be part of the conspiracy.

When I reached the villa, I was locked out, of course, and had to ring the bell. Eva looked surprised when she saw me.

"I went for a walk," I explained.

She opened the gate, her face expressionless. Arne was nowhere in sight. Perhaps he had not yet returned.

Fru Isacson felt better in the afternoon and wanted me to read to her.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have you this morning," she said. "Such a bore! Every so often I get a spell where the pain is worse than usual, and I have to have extra sedation. I try not to take more than I have to. The thing I fear most is that the disease will ultimately defeat my mind as well as my body."

My heart ached for the courageous little woman, but there was nothing I could do to help

her except to maintain the matter-of-fact attitude that she preferred. Maudlin sympathy would have outraged her. I could only lead her away in spirit through the magic of the printed page, or wander with her down the sunlit paths of childhood.

The next few days passed uneventfully, with no more phantom visitations. I continued having a morning swim with Arne, and met Peter every afternoon. I did not see the man with the moustache again. Arne and I were always polite to each other, and we never discussed anything very personal. Even though I knew that he was aware of my meetings with Peter, I did not bring the subject up. Why should I?

Only once did the iron guard he seemed to have set up around himself falter. I had been swimming while Arne watched from a rock, and I came running out, laughing and shaking the water out of my hair. When I paused in front of him, for just a moment something leaped into his eyes—a swift flame of passion—and he started to raise his arms as though he were going to seize me. But then his eyes went blank again, and his arms dropped to his sides.

He made some commonplace remark about the water, and I went on by, but my knees were trembling and my heart was beating painfully.

With Peter there were no moments like that; we were always calm and happy, never alone together. I was satisfied to keep it like that, because at that time I needed friendship more than love. I was too confused emotionally to want a more complicated involvement with him.

And every day we drew a little closer to the sixteenth of July.

On the fourteenth I was surprised to receive a letter postmarked Torsby, Sweden. I didn't know why it surprised me—obviously someone had told Beth I was at Capriccio—but up to that moment she had simply seemed like a character in a story, not entirely real. I took the letter to my room and read it slowly.

My dear Kim,

I can't begin to tell you how pleased and excited I was to hear that you are at Capriccio! And provoked, too, because I am not there to see you. You must promise to visit us here at the farm before you go back to the

States. I simply could not bear not to see you at all!

I know you probably don't remember me very well from that year at the Academy, but I have never forgotten how kind you were to me, and I will always be grateful.

Arne wrote and told me you were at Capriccio—doing the job I ran out on! I'm ashamed of myself, but I couldn't bring myself to go back. You may think I'm nuts, but that grotto *is* haunted, Kim!

Anyway, I wanted to tell you just what did happen to me, so that you will be careful and not let it happen to you. Remember, no matter what you hear down there—*keep away from the grotto at night!*

I dreamed a lot about it and imagined that something was creeping up the stairs, but that was just my imagination. You know how I am! But one night I really did wake up and hear something. I tried to wake Jan, but he was sleeping too soundly—and that was one thing I wanted to warn you about, Kim.

We always had coffee at bedtime, and Eva would put some in our thermos when she got dinner, and later Emil would bring it to our

room with a little snack. Maybe you do the same thing. Anyway, that night Jan had drunk his, but I thought it tasted funny and didn't finish it. Kim, I'm sure it was drugged —that's why I couldn't wake him up. Of course, after I fell down the stairs they did manage to wake him up, but I think he'd had some sort of sleeping pills all the same, just as I was meant to.

That's why I went downstairs alone. Of course I was scared green, but I had to know what was going on. The door to the tunnel stairs was open, and I could see a flickering light from the torch at the bottom and could hear the faint sound of voices. I remembered the old legend that on certain nights the ancient rituals of the grotto are reenacted, and I was terrified, but I still wanted to see what was down there.

I started down the stairs without a flashlight, just wearing thin mules on my feet, which was foolish, I know. When I got to the part of the stairs where you can see all the way to the bottom, I still couldn't see who was there, but I heard voices on the beach. I took another step, and that was when I

slipped and fell, and I don't remember any more. I woke up in the hospital. I don't think anyone was behind me—I think I just slipped—but I couldn't swear to it, it all happened so fast.

That's all I can tell you, Kim. I've no idea who was down there, but it wasn't a dream! And I'm sure it was the same thing that was there the night Grandmother had her experience, even though they did convince her it was a nightmare.

So please be careful, Kim, and write and tell me what is happening to you there. Do you like Arne? He's very sweet, I think, but hard to get to know. Well, if I weren't so chicken I'd come back there now for a visit, but I just can't bring myself to ever set foot in Capriccio again. Not even to see you, my dear old friend!

All my love,

Beth (Smudge!)

P.S. I'm fine now, except that I get headaches once in a while.

I read the letter several times, then sat on my bed for a long time thinking about it. Apparently

Beth did not have the slightest suspicion of her brother-in-law.

I looked at the thermos bottle on the table by my bed. Yes, I did have coffee every night. Both Arne and I did. How easy it would be, I mused, for someone down in the kitchen to put something into the coffee before the thermos was brought upstairs. How very easy, indeed.

CHAPTER NINE

Peter and I usually spent the few hours we had together every day in taking short sightseeing trips around the town. There were many interesting places we could walk to, such as the Giardini d'Augusto, the great Castiglione, built by Edda Mussolini and her husband, and, of course, the Belvedere di Tragara with its magnificent view. Sometimes we just sat in our favorite sidewalk cafe and talked.

He was always amusing and sweetly ardent, but he never went beyond his form of verbal courtship. I had never known anyone quite like him, and he puzzled me, although I loved being with him. He never suggested that we go to his room, and I, in turn, never asked him to Capriccio. I wanted to keep my friendship with him completely separate from my life at the villa, and I

suppose, too, that I had no desire for a confrontation between Arne and Peter.

Even though I knew that they were both aware of each other's existence, neither of them mentioned the other. I was quite content to keep it that way. It did not seem likely that Peter and I would run into Arne during our hikes around the island, because he seldom left the villa except for a stroll before retiring or a jaunt out in the boat to fish.

One day when Peter and I were strolling along one of the many winding streets of Capri, he indicated a white house nearly concealed behind vine-covered walls and masses of shrubbery.

"That's where I live, Kim. I have a front room on the second floor."

"It looks charming," I replied.

"Would you like to see it?"

"All right," I agreed, rather curious to see what he had in mind.

His room in the *pensione* was large and airy, and the balcony offered the usual view of the Mediterranean. In one corner there was a sink and a little hot plate where he could prepare simple meals. The room was not as tidy as Arne's; a few

clothes were strewn around, and dirty plates were stacked in the sink.

"Excuse the mess," he said apologetically. "I hadn't planned on asking you up here when I left this afternoon."

I wondered what had made him change his mind.

A picture standing on the dresser caught my attention, and I went over to look at it. It showed a middle-aged woman and a man dressed in slacks and jackets sitting on the porch of a rustic log cabin surrounded by tall pines.

"Are these your parents?" I asked.

He came over and stood beside me. "Yes. That was taken at our summer place on Puget Sound. It's great there—I wish you could see it."

They were pleasant-looking people. The woman looked a bit like Peter, I thought, especially around the eyes, and they had the same hair line—a deep widow's peak, with brown hair waving crisply back from it. She was tall and thin, while the man was fairly heavy. He was bald and rather jolly-looking, with a big grin.

"You look like your mother," I told him.

"Yes, that's what everyone says."

"The widow's peak," I said, and put up my hand to touch the smooth brown hair where it grew down on his forehead. He laughed softly, and his fingers closed around my wrist.

"Oh, Kim!" he said, and pulled me into his arms. He kissed me for the first time, a tentative, gentle kiss.

"Do you think you could love me, Kim?" he asked. "Is it too soon?"

There was something in his eyes, in his voice, in the way that he held me that baffled me. I didn't know what it was, but I had the feeling that there was a sheet of glass between us. Something was bothering him; something was putting a barrier between us. I wasn't going to fight it. If he wanted me, he would have to break through the barrier himself. I drew away.

"We'd better wait a bit, Peter," I told him quietly.

He clung to my hand and gazed at me with his clear brown eyes. "You're everything I've ever wanted in a girl, Kim," he murmured. "It's like a miracle that we found each other. Don't you feel that way?"

"Yes," I agreed, "it does seem that way—almost

too perfect. Maybe that's why I want to wait. You don't mind too much, do you?"

"Of course not. Anything worth having is worth waiting for. If you can just give me a little hope—"

"I like you better than any boy I've ever known. Will that do for now?"

He smiled, his sweet, boyish grin. "I guess it'll have to!"

He kissed me again, and then we left. When we came down the flight of stone stairs to the street, there, only a few feet away, stood Arne. He looked at us without surprise, but his blue eyes were frosty.

I was almost too startled to speak, and when I did manage to, I found myself stammering—to my intense annoyance.

"Herr Isacson, I—I'd like you to meet my f-friend, P-Peter Mason—" I stopped, biting my lip angrily, and wished that I knew how to vanish into thin air.

"How do you do, sir," Peter said cordially, holding out his hand. "Kim has told me a lot about you."

That wasn't true. I had told him practically

nothing. And it was a wonder that he didn't turn into solid ice from the glacial look Arne gave him. Arne made no move to take the proffered hand.

"You have the advantage of me," Arne replied. "She has never mentioned you." He turned and strode away.

When I tried to apologize to Peter for Arne's inexcusable rudeness, he put his arm around my shoulders with a laugh and said, "Forget it, darling. The guy's obviously in love with you, and he's jealous because you were in my room."

"In love with me!" I cried. "He hates me!" And to my utter chagrin I burst into tears.

Peter soothed me, and when I calmed down a bit, he walked me back to the villa. It was almost dinnertime by then, and I didn't see how I could face Arne. I thought of staying in my room, but then I realized that since I would have to see him again sooner or later, I might as well get it over with.

When Eva rang the chimes, I braced myself and went down to the terrace.

Arne was there, so I said in my haughtiest voice, "You were extremely rude to my friend, Herr Isacson, without any reason whatever."

To my surprise, Arne's iciness seemed to have

vanished, and he said apologetically, "I am sorry, Kim."

This attitude only seemed to make me angrier.

"Is that all you can say?" I demanded.

He came around to pull out my chair. "What do you want me to say?" he asked.

When he took his place across from me, I glared at him. "I will not be spied on, you know. What I do away from the villa is my own affair, as I have already told you."

"Of course, Kim." He calmly began to eat his soup. "But since I am the head of the household here, I feel responsible for your safety. You are very young and far from home—"

"I'm not all that young! And I can take care of myself!"

"Can you?" he asked with mild interest.

I swallowed a few indignant spoonfuls.

"Peter is a very nice boy—"

"Do you know anything about him, except what he has told you?"

"No, but—good heavens, I would know if he weren't what he says he is! He's always been a perfect gentleman—"

"It was not too wise to go to his room," Arne remarked, pushing aside his plate.

"Oh, Arne! Honestly! And I thought Swedes were supposed to be so broad-minded!"

"You have a lot to learn about Swedes, my dear," he replied mildly.

When the meal was over, Arne went off somewhere, but I sat there in the gathering dusk, trying to sort out my thoughts. Eva came out to clear away the dessert dishes; she hesitated and gave me a look as though she wanted to say something. I smiled at her encouragingly.

"Yes, Eva?" I prompted.

She ran her tongue over her lips, then shook her head, picked up the tray of dishes, and shuffled off into the house. Her shoulders had a dispirited droop; she looked old and tired.

I wished fervently that the sixteenth of July had come and gone. I dreaded that it might bring the confirmation of all my suspicions. No matter how much he angered me at times, or how much I thought I disliked him, I did not want to know that I was right about Arne.

That night I dreamed that I was in the grotto as a sort of invisible spectator. I saw the flickering torches, and down the dark winding steps came a procession of white-robed figures. They were chanting something in a strange language, and

their faces were covered with hoods. They all gathered in a circle around the place below the carved bull where an altar had once stood, and I saw that there was an altar there again and that a figure lay upon it.

One of the hooded figures advanced toward the altar, and the gleam of a curved dagger flashed in his hand. He raised it high and cried—this time in English—"In the name of Mithras, great god of light, I take thee—"

And as the dagger flashed down I saw the figure on the altar clearly, and it was Arne—

I screamed and screamed and woke up bathed in perspiration, but my screams were really only a whimper, and no one had heard me. This time I knew it had only been a dream, but still I lay there for a long time, crying quietly into my pillow.

I did not like the Casa Capriccio with its ancient phantoms. I wanted to go away, far away, where things were fresh and clean and new, and where the old gods never came.

CHAPTER TEN

The next day I felt weary and depressed. The tensions were building up at Capriccio; even Fru Isacson seemed to feel it, although she knew nothing of its cause. She grew tired of being read to quickly and was not even inclined to talk, so I left before our usual time together was up that morning.

Arne and I had our usual pre-lunch swim, and he seemed even more preoccupied than usual. When I came out of the water and picked up my towel, he was sitting on a rock gazing at me thoughtfully.

"I've been thinking, Kim," he said. "Beth is very eager to have you at the farm for a visit, so why don't you fly up to Sweden for a week or so? I will pay your fare. Farmor can get along without you for a bit; in fact, she wants you to visit Beth

before you go back to the States. Would you like that?"

It was so transparent, it was almost funny; he wanted to get me out of the way until after the sixteenth. Since he hadn't been able to scare me off, he would try bribery. I was tempted to say, "Wouldn't it be cheaper just to dope me, like you tried to do to Beth?" But I refrained.

"That's very sweet of you," I replied sarcastically, "but if you don't mind, I'll wait until I'm ready to leave Italy. I wouldn't dream of leaving your grandmother just now."

"I wish you would go now, Kim. This is the best time of the year for Sweden. Fall comes early there."

"That may well be, but I have all the rest of my life to visit Sweden—and only a short time with Fru Isacson. I've grown very fond of her."

In spite of his obvious disappointment, Arne's expression softened. "She is a wonderful person. I don't know what I will do without her."

I turned to go, anxious to get away from him instead of spending my usual period sunning on the beach. When I brushed past him on the rock, he reached out and gripped my wrist.

"Are you going to see Mason today?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I? He is the only friend I have here."

"I wish that you wouldn't. Believe me, I have my reasons for asking this."

"I'm sure you do!" I tried to pull away, but his grip tightened. "I told you before to stay out of my affairs!" I shouted angrily. "If you must know, Peter means a great deal to me! I might even marry him!"

Arne stared at me for a moment, and then, to my surprise and chagrin, he began to laugh. Not in a sneering, nasty way, but a real laugh of genuine amusement. I reacted instantly and quite spontaneously by raising my free hand and slapping him resoundingly on the cheek.

"I hate you!" I cried. "I wish I never had to see you again!"

He had released my wrist when I hit him, and I ran off into the grotto and up the stone steps without looking back. By the time I had showered and put on a dress I had calmed down a bit, but I was still furious with Arne. I couldn't bear the thought of facing him at lunch, and I wanted desperately to see Peter; he was the only rock I had to cling to in all of this baffling confusion.

I crossed the terrace and went out the gate, thankful that Arne was not around. Up to this time I had never seen Peter except at our regular afternoon meetings, but now I did not want to wait. I had to find him now, to talk to him now. I had kept everything to myself too long; I was bursting with the need to find a friendly confidant.

At the *pensione* I asked his portly landlady if Signore Mason were in, and she waved me on with a friendly grin. Peter opened the door when I tapped on it, and looked astonished when he saw me.

"Why, Kim! Is something wrong?"

"Not really wrong," I replied forlornly. "It's just—well, everything sort of boiled over between Arne and me this morning, and I have to talk to somebody. I don't have anyone but you."

He took my arm and drew me in, closing the door.

"Kim, darling, of course you can talk to me. I've suspected all along you were worried about something, but I didn't want to pry. Was he angry because you came here yesterday?"

"No, he didn't seem to be, but he did ask me

not to see you any more, and of course that made me furious. But there's so much more to it than that—I hardly know where to begin."

Peter waved his hand toward the table out on his little balcony.

"I was just about to have my lunch—some bread, cheese, and red wine. Not very fancy, but how about joining me and then we can talk?"

The wine surprised me a little, because, from several things he had said, I had thought that he never drank anything—but I supposed he figured that when in Rome . . .

"All right, Peter. Thank you."

He got out another glass and plate and put another of the rickety chairs up to the table, and we sat down. I gazed at the sea, sipped a little wine, and began to feel better. When I had finished off a slice of the crusty Italian bread covered liberally with *caciotta,* I began to talk.

He had already known, of course, the legend of the grotto and Beth's misadventures there, but now I told him all the things I had hesitated to discuss before: my suspicions of Arne and the things I had seen him doing.

Peter listened without comment, except for an

occasional question to clear up some point I missed. He seemed to be deeply affected by my story, and I noticed that he had actually grown a bit pale under his golden tan.

"So I suppose," I concluded finally, "that since he couldn't persuade me to leave, he'll dope my coffee on the sixteenth to keep me out of his way —for whatever it is he intends to do that night."

Peter leaned one elbow on the table with his hand supporting his head and shading his eyes for a few minutes, apparently in deep thought. I was touched at his concern and a bit surprised. In spite of his curious reserve, I thought, he must care for me more deeply than I had believed possible.

Finally he looked up, and I could see that he was deeply troubled, even frightened.

"None of it makes much sense, does it?" he said. "And yet it frightens me to think of you in that place. I wish you would leave."

"I can't. I've got to see it through," I said.

"I can see why you think Isacson tried to scare off your friend Beth—to have a clear field with the inheritance. But the rest of it—what could he be up to? Do you think the servants are in on it?"

"They have to be. They are both awfully worried about something, and I know Emil is helping Arne with whatever it is. I've seen them talking. The night I saw the face in my room, for instance —Arne was asleep in his room, so it must have been Emil."

Peter took a deep sip of wine, and some of his color returned. "It sounds so utterly fantastic," he murmured.

Somehow while I had been talking, going over the whole affair again with Peter, the pieces had begun to fall into place. It was like one of those old-fashioned comic strips where a lighted bulb is shown over a character's head when he catches on to something. The light clicked on over my head and I exclaimed: "Peter! I think I've got it—the only explanation that fits everything!"

"Then you must be a lot smarter than I! It doesn't make any sense to me at all."

"Well, you've just heard about it, but it's been simmering in my subconscious for days. It's got to be smuggling, Peter!"

His gaze grew very intent. "Smuggling, Kim?"

"Yes! Why not? It's a perfect spot, one of the few places on the island where you can get in and out by boat. Arne has been living in Rome for a

number of years and might well have gotten involved with some criminal types in the course of his work. He must have conceived the plan as an easy way to get rich. The stuff—"

"What stuff?"

"How should I know? Whatever they smuggle around here—dope, probably. It could be brought by ship from Turkey, couldn't it? Arne would be notified when an assignment was due—the date I found on the paper in his pocket—then that night he would go out in the fishing boat to a rendezvous with the other ship, bring back the stuff to Capriccio, and deliver it to whomever he's working with. No one would ever search him! Don't you see how perfect it is?"

"Kim, I think you've been watching too much TV!"

"No, listen. He wanted to get Jan and Beth out of the way, not only because he wanted to inherit the villa in order to continue with his smuggling, but because they might get in the way the night he had to make the pickup. When he couldn't scare them off in time, he had their coffee doped. The Lindgrens must be helping him. Beth didn't drink her coffee, and when she started down to

the cave, perhaps one of them pushed her down the steps.

"The same thing happened to Fru Isacson a couple of years ago, and they turned off the lights to confuse her until they could lock the door to the tunnel and get back to their rooms. Don't you see? This has been going on for some time now. And just when Arne finally got Jan and Beth out of the way, I showed up. So he started all over again—trying to frighten *me* off—and when that failed, he's trying to persuade me to leave. Now I suppose he'll have to dope *my* coffee."

Peter stood up and began to pace back and forth in his room, his face blank with concentration.

"It's all horribly melodramatic," he said, "but I suppose you could be right."

"Of course I'm right! Things like that happen all the time. But the question is, what can I do about it? I don't want him to get away with it, but I can't hope to round up the whole smuggling ring single-handed."

"I'm glad you realize that," Peter said wryly. "But what about that character you saw him talk-

ing to, the fellow with the moustache, the one you thought was following you? How does he fit in?"

I shrugged. "One of his henchmen, no doubt, that he had keep an eye on me, although I'll admit I can't see why. But what do you think I ought to do now, Peter?"

"Not 'I'—we," he replied. "You're not alone now, Kim."

"You don't know what a relief *that* is! Do you think we should go to the police?"

He shook his head. "You must realize, darling, that in order to prove anything, Arne would have to be caught with the contraband. He has to be allowed to go through with his plans. That's when the police should step in."

"But how can we manage that?"

"I'll tell you what, Kim. I know a man in Naples who is some sort of undercover agent—like our FBI. Let me talk to him, and he can arrange to have his men waiting to pick up Isacson on the night of the sixteenth—if anything does happen at Capriccio."

"But how will they know whether it does or doesn't?"

"Isacson would have to have a flare down on

the beach to guide him in and out. Let the police work that out. They'll know how to handle it."

For the first time it occurred to me that such a procedure might be dangerous. Suppose there were shooting—

"Isn't there any other way?" I asked doubtfully. "I wouldn't want him to get hurt."

"If he likes to play dangerous games," Peter said impatiently, "he'll have to take his chances. And as for you, I want you to stay in your room that night. Perhaps you should take Arne up on that offer to send you to Sweden. Give the devil his due, I think he is trying to protect you."

"Nonsense! He only wants me out of the way, and I am certainly not going!"

"Then will you promise not to stir out of your room that night—no matter what you hear?"

I was surprised and rather thrilled at the masterful way Peter was taking charge. Up to now I must confess that I had considered him rather on the timid side, but I had certainly been mistaken about that! He seemed like a different person now as he regarded me sternly.

"Yes, Peter," I agreed meekly. But I had my fingers crossed behind my back.

As I was leaving, Peter said, "Meet me again at

the usual time this afternoon. You mustn't do anything off your regular schedule until this is over. It might make him suspicious. I'll try to make contact with my friend by that time."

Arne was not around when I got back to the villa, and later, when I returned to town to meet Peter at the cafe, he was looking quite pleased.

"It's all arranged," he told me. "Fortunately I was able to call my friend, and instead of laughing at your suspicions, he was very excited. He told me that they have suspected for some time that narcotics were bring brought in through Capri, but have been unable to discover the source. They will have men watching the villa tomorrow night, and when they see him returning to the cove, they'll move in."

I should have been elated by this news, but I was only frightened.

"How will they get in?" I asked.

"Well, they could break in, but my friend said it would be helpful if you could arrange to leave the gate unlocked before you go to your room. Do you think you could do that without being seen?"

"I suppose so. Sometimes Arne goes for a walk before turning in, but I shouldn't think he would

tomorrow. Even if he does I'll wait until he comes back and then go down and unlock the gate."

Peter frowned. "I'm not sure if you should do that. He might hear you. Actually, I'd rather you kept out of this altogether."

"How can I keep out of it? I'm involved up to my teeth," I replied crossly. "Don't worry, I'll be careful."

"I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you, darling."

"Nothing will. Arne is the one in danger."

He looked at me sharply. "That's an odd way of putting it. He *is* the criminal, isn't he? Don't you want him caught? You said you didn't want him to get away with it."

"No—but I don't want him to get shot!" I protested.

"Sometimes I think you are in love with him," Peter said accusingly.

"How could I love a man like that?"

"You might have fallen for him before you knew what he was."

"That's beside the point. I'm helping the police arrest him, aren't I?"

"I hope so. Don't let your emotions trick you at the last moment into trying to warn him. That

could be very dangerous." Peter was scowling at me.

"I'm not that big an idiot!" I protested.

"Well, I hope not." He didn't look altogether reassured.

When I got back to the villa, Arne was sitting on the terrace. He was the last person I wanted to see, and I tried to hurry by without speaking, but he got up and barred my way.

"Kim—please don't be angry with me," he said. "I apologize for this morning. I was very rude. I did not mean to laugh at you."

It seemed as though he were always apologizing for something lately. I looked up at him—the good, clean lines of his face, the quizzical expression in his blue eyes, the wry twist of his mouth—and my heart contracted with pain. How could appearances be so deceiving? How could this man be a dangerous dope smuggler? At that moment I found that I could not really believe it.

"I don't know what was so funny about the idea of my marrying Peter," I said haughtily to hide my pain.

"No, there is certainly nothing funny about it," he agreed. "Are you in love with him, Kim?"

I wanted to say yes, I was, but the words would

not come out. Instead I replied bleakly, "I don't know. I really don't know him very well."

A light seemed to come on behind his eyes.

"I am glad, Kim," he said.

I could not bear the way he was looking at me, so I went on past him and up to my room.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The night of the fifteenth I slept very little. I had taken one of my mild little nonprescription sleeping pills at bedtime, hoping to get some rest by artificial means, and it did allow me to drift off after an hour or so, but it was not a restful sleep. Dream crowded upon dream, all rather horrid and confusing ones without meaning.

But then I dreamed that I was on a long white beach entirely unlike anything on Capri, and Arne was there, looking at me with his quizzical smile, and suddenly the place was filled with men in uniform, all running around yelling and brandishing rifles. They saw Arne, and he started to run away down the beach; they began firing at him, and I saw him fall. I ran to him and knelt beside him, and he had blood all over him, but he was still smiling at me.

I held him in my arms, sobbing, "Arne! Arne! Forgive me!"

"Kim," he murmured, "we could have been so happy, if only—" Then he turned his face away and died. I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up into the smiling, evil face of the statue.

"Come away!" he said in a queer, echoing voice, like one heard through a long tunnel. "Come away! Come away! Come—"

It faded and dwindled off into a whisper, and I woke up whimpering and clutching the bedclothes. That finished my sleep for that night. I didn't need a psychologist to explain that dream to me. I realized that I was scared silly for fear that I had signed Arne's death warrant when I went to Peter for help.

I tried to imagine what Arne would do when he found the police waiting for him in the cove when he returned from his smuggling expedition. Would he put up his hands tamely and surrender? I didn't think so. I had been watching the FBI program on television for years, and in the final scene, when confronted with the agents, the criminal always chose to shoot it out. And even though he got the first shot in, it was the agent's bullet

that found its mark. Criminals, I had decided, were just naturally lousy shots.

I had always felt, like all honest, law-abiding citizens, that a criminal deserved what he got. But that was purely in the abstract. Brought down to a very real young man named Arne Isacson, I simply did not want him to get shot. I did not think I could bear it. But he had to be stopped; dope traffic was a revolting thing. I couldn't have lived with myself if I had not tried to do something about it when I had the chance.

I couldn't warn Arne, not after bringing the police in on it and promising Peter to keep out of it. But there must be some other way to save him, to have him taken quietly with no danger of violence.

I was quite sure that he meant to drug me for the coming night. Suppose I were to turn the tables on him? What would happen if he didn't keep his assignation? If Emil found him unconscious, would he take Arne's place? They must be in this together, so it was likely that he would, rather than miss the delivery. That way it would be Emil who would run into the police on his return from the ship. Would Emil be shot, then?

No, I didn't think so. It was only the top criminal who refused to surrender; the underlings always dropped their guns meekly. Emil seemed to be a timid little man who would not even carry a gun, so I was reasonably certain that he would be arrested without a struggle. Then the police could take the drugged Arne peacefully, and nobody would get hurt.

It seemed the only possible solution. I knew that Peter and the police would be a bit displeased with me, but I couldn't help that. I would not risk being responsible for the death of another human being, no matter what he was doing.

I dragged myself out of bed and went down to the terrace for breakfast.

Arne looked tense and extremely keyed up, as well he might, I thought sadly. We talked pleasantly enough—somehow Arne and I had never stayed angry with each other for long no matter what happened—but it was obvious that his thoughts were far away.

I felt almost maternal toward him in a melancholy sort of way, as though he were already behind bars and I had saved him from execution.

Oh, Arne, I said to him silently, why did you

have to get into this when you had so much going for you? Don't you know that crime doesn't pay? Why couldn't you—

"Why are you looking at me like that, Kim?" Arne asked.

"Like what?" I was so startled that I spilled a little coffee on my shirt.

"I don't know. Well—as though I were a corpse laid out for viewing. I've been expecting you to say any minute, 'Doesn't he look natural!' "

I scrubbed at my shirt with my napkin and didn't look at him.

"Don't be silly. I have a headache, that's all. I didn't sleep well."

"Nightmares again?"

"You might say so."

"The statue?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

He reached out and took my hand. "Someday Capriccio will not give you any more nightmares. You will learn to love it as I do. The horrible things that may have happened here are long gone. Only the beauty remains. Look—isn't it beautiful, Kim?" He indicated the incomparable view spreading out below us.

I looked at the Faraglioni, and my eyes filled with tears. Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile, I thought.

"Yes, Arne," I told him. "I think it must be the most beautiful view in the world."

"Equal to any, at least."

Emil appeared and murmured something to Arne in a low voice, and Arne excused himself and they went away. The day of intrigue had begun.

Fru Isacson was aware that something was in the wind.

"Eva is so jumpy today," she told me. "She keeps dropping things. Every so often she gets that way. As I recall, she was that way the day before Beth had her accident, and even the time I had that nightmare. It isn't a coincidence, Kim. Something happens at night in the cave at regular intervals. Do you have any idea yet what it is?"

I felt sick when I thought of the shock it would be to her when her beloved grandson and her faithful servants were arrested. Could she survive it? Already I was bitterly regretting my part in their exposure, even though I knew I had had to

do it. At least I would try to make sure that Arne survived. I took the frail old hand in mine.

"I have a few ideas," I told her, "but I can't talk about it now. It will soon be over."

"Tonight," she said. "Something will happen tonight."

"I think so."

"Kim, I can't forget what happened to Beth. Nothing must happen to you. You will stay away from the grotto, won't you? Let Arne handle it."

I looked away. "Nothing will happen to me. You mustn't worry. Everything will be all right, I promise you." I don't know why I said that, when things were so wrong, but I couldn't bear to see her distress.

I met Peter as usual, because he had said that it would look odd if I failed to on that particular day. He was as tense and excited as everybody else.

"It's all set, darling," he told me while I was drinking my capuccino. "The narcotics agents will be waiting for Isacson when he returns from the rendezvous. Just remember to unlock the gate and then stay in your room. No matter what—stay in your room!"

I wished that people would stop telling me that. I also wished that I were a thousand miles away and had never heard of the Casa Capriccio and its mysterious grotto.

There was no use in trying to explain to Peter how guilty I felt; he would never understand. He patted my hand.

"Chin up, old girl," he said consolingly. "It will soon be over."

We parted quickly, and I returned to the villa in a horrible state of mind. Neither Arne nor I ate much dinner. Eva managed to drop our tray of coffee. She acted exactly the way I felt. I wondered how much a part she played in the proceedings—and why she put up with it. She certainly wasn't a criminal type: just a devoted middle-aged housekeeper. The whole affair was so bewildering.

When we had finished, Arne excused himself and left the villa. I supposed he was going out for a last check with one of the gang—probably the man with the moustache. I would have to wait until he returned before I could unlock the gate.

Soon after coming to Capriccio, I had learned that every evening when dinner was over, Eva relieved the nurse with Fru Isacson and Emil did

the dishes and fixed a tray to take to Arne's room. The tray consisted of a small thermos of coffee and some rolls for his bedtime snack—just as Emil had done for Jan and Beth. Arne had asked me if I wanted the same brought to my room, and I had agreed. So it had become routine for Emil to bring up the two trays to our rooms. Shortly after that the doctor usually arrived to check on Fru Isacson and to give her her nightly shot. Arne always had a chat with the doctor before he left, and it was during this period that I had planned to switch thermos bottles.

I was positive that mine would contain some sort of sleeping potion; after all, they didn't want me barging down to the cave in the middle of the proceedings the way Beth had. So what could be more simple than to exchange the bottles when no one was around?

I reflected bitterly that everyone—friend and foe alike—was determined to keep me out of the cave that night.

Of course, I couldn't be sure that Arne would go to his room and drink his coffee, but I had to go on the assumption that he would. After all, he probably had several hours to wait after things

quieted down for the night, and he would need the coffee to keep himself alert.

It was even easier than I had expected. Emil brought the trays up at the usual time and departed. Arne still had not returned from whatever errand he had gone on, and everything was quiet upstairs. Eva was preparing her mistress for the night, and the doctor had not come yet. After looking carefully around the hall to make sure that no one was in sight, I carried my thermos bottle into Arne's room. The bottles were identical. I took the one on his tray, put mine in its place, and took his back to my room. I realized I was being very foolish—that with Arne out of commission, the whole thing might fall through and the police would be frustrated in their efforts to round up the drug ring, but I still was determined that he should not be shot because of me.

I sat on my bed and waited. I heard the doctor come and go; I heard Arne, who had apparently returned from his errand, talking to him in the downstairs hall. Then I heard Arne come upstairs and go into his room. I had changed into slacks, a sweater, and sneakers in preparation for what the night might bring; I had no intention of

staying tamely in my room as everyone was so determined I should.

The coast seemed to be clear now, so I ran downstairs and across the terrace to the gate. It didn't take but a moment to adjust the lock so that it could be opened from the outside. Then I returned to my room.

I left my light on until around eleven, since it was my custom to read until that time. Then I turned it out and sat in the dark, drinking a bit of coffee from time to time, knowing that this bottle would not be drugged.

I was tense and frightened, and all sorts of thoughts kept leaping around in my mind like jackrabbits on a moonlit night. Finally I heard the sound of the big door to the tunnel being opened. I was puzzled why Emil had not come up to find out why Arne hadn't joined him. I opened my door a crack and looked out. The upstairs hall was quiet and deserted.

Slowly I went out and walked over to the door to Arne's room. I had to find out if he was there. Perhaps, I thought fearfully, he had not drunk the coffee, and it had been he that I heard opening the tunnel door. He might have gone down without my hearing him pass my door.

His room was dark. Very slowly and carefully, I gripped the doorknob and eased the door open. The moon was shining through the French windows and I saw Arne, fully dressed in dark slacks and a dark sweater, lying across his bed. His head was thrown back and he was snoring faintly. I heaved a sigh of relief. At least he was safe. But why hadn't Emil come up to check on him? Why had he gone to the grotto alone?

This deviation from what I had expected worried me. I went back out to the hall, closing Arne's door behind me, then stood irresolute for a few moments. No one seemed to be around; surely it would be safe enough to take a look into the grotto. I would be very careful not to slip on the stairs as Beth had done.

When I got downstairs, I found the door to the tunnel open and could see a flickering light, just as Beth and Fru Isacson had described it. Slowly I began the descent, feeling my way cautiously with each step. I didn't have a flashlight, but there was enough light to see where I was going. Every few steps I glanced nervously over my shoulder to make certain that no one was sneaking down behind me.

I reached the bottom of the stairs safely and

stood beside the flaring torch that had been placed in the bracket. The cave was empty, but I heard men's voices out on the beach; they were loud and sounded angry. They seemed to be speaking in Swedish. Emil, I thought—but who else? I hadn't expected a third man to show up. The man with the moustache? But he and Arne had spoken in Italian. There was something familiar about that other voice—

More and more puzzled, I crept through the cave without a thought for its dancing shadows and possible phantoms. At the entrance I paused again. The men were down at the edge of the water by the boat, which had been pulled to a position ready for launching. Another flare had been stuck into the sand on a pole, and by its fitful light I could see Emil and another man, whose back was turned toward me. He was tall, dressed in dark trousers and a sweater, as Arne was, and had one of those striped Italian knit caps with a long tassel pulled over his head, covering his hair.

Emil was looking up at him, his face contorted with more anger than I had thought him capable of feeling. As I watched I saw him shake his fist at the other man. Then he leaped at him, and the man raised his fist and struck Emil, who fell to the

sand, striking his head against a jagged rock. I saw blood oozing from the wound on his temple, and I let out an involuntary cry of horror.

The man turned his head to look at me, and the torchlight shone full upon his face. It was Peter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I ran to him in utter confusion. "Peter!" I clutched his arm. "What are you doing here? Didn't you call the police? Did you decide to capture them by yourself?"

"I thought I told you to stay in your room," he replied in a low, furious voice.

"Never mind that!" I shook him in a frenzy of excitement. "What are you going to do? Where are the police?"

He was looking past me toward the grotto. "Where is Isacson?" he demanded.

"Oh, don't worry about him! I drugged him."

He stared at me. "You—what?"

"I drugged him. I was afraid he'd get shot. I thought Emil would go instead. Peter, will you please explain—"

He wet his lips with his tongue. "Kim, I—I lied to you. I didn't know any secret agent. I wanted to

impress you. I thought you might like me better—"

"Oh, Peter! Now we've spoiled it! No one will make the pickup— Why did you hit Emil?"

"He caught me hiding behind a rock and attacked me. You saw him—but it isn't spoiled," he went on quickly. "I'll make the pickup myself and turn the stuff over to the police."

"How will you know where to find the ship?"

"It's bound to be out there someplace. You stay with Emil. I'll be back soon." He turned and jumped in the boat and started to push off with an oar.

It was all happening too fast—I was utterly distraught. I looked at Emil lying in the sand. He groaned and rolled over. The cut didn't seem to be too serious, and he seemed to be coming to. I ran over to the boat and flung myself onto the bottom just as it glided out into the water.

"What are you doing?" Peter yelled. "Get out of here!"

"No! I'm going with you. It's all my fault—I got you into this. I don't want you to get hurt."

"What do you think you can do about it?"

"I don't know, but I'm going along, anyway."

He shrugged, threw the oar down, and started

up the outboard motor. "Well, it's your funeral," he said.

I sat up and stared at him indignantly. He was steering the boat skillfully in and out of the jagged rocks that guarded the entrance to the cove. It seemed rather odd that he could do it so well—in the dark at that—when he had never done it before. It occurred to me then that a good many things were rather odd.

"Peter," I said, "I didn't know you could speak Swedish!"

"I learned it from my mother," he replied. "She was born in Sweden."

"You never told me that! In fact, you didn't even seem to like Swedes; you said they were tricky—"

He gave me a brief, impatient glance but did not reply. We were in open water now, heading straight out to sea. The boat had no lights, but it was such a bright moonlit night that it was almost as easy to get around as by daylight.

I moved closer to him, troubled and confused. "Peter—" I began again, but he interrupted me.

"Shut up, Kim," he said roughly, "and lie down in the bottom of the boat. I don't want anyone to see you."

I looked over my shoulder and saw that we were approaching a ship anchored out in the water not more than half a mile from shore. It was showing a few lights, and from what I could make out, it appeared to be one of the fishing boats common in the Mediterranean. I lay down in the bottom of the boat. In a few minutes Peter cut the motor and we were drifting.

I heard a low, guttural voice, and Peter replied in Italian. Then there was a thud as a package was tossed from the fishing boat into ours. At once Peter turned the motor on full force and sped away.

"All right," he said in a little while, "you can sit up now if you like."

I sat up and looked around the lonely expanse of moonlit water heaving gently around us. I looked at Peter, whose handsome face was tense and rather grim.

"Who are you?" I asked. I felt completely disoriented, as though my world had suddenly turned upside down.

"I'm Peter Mason from Seattle—just as I told you."

"That may be—but the rest of it was all lies, wasn't it? You are the smuggler—not Arne."

"Congratulations! You've finally figured it out!"

I shook my head, trying to clear away the cobwebs. There was still so much that I did not understand.

"Tell me, Peter," I said. "Please. From the beginning."

He shrugged. "Well, I suppose it doesn't matter now. I was born in Sweden. My mother was a young farm girl named Eva Nordqvist, and my father was a Polish refugee. He died of pneumonia before I was born, and Eva gave me to her cousin, Ingrid Mason, who was married to an American and happened to be visiting on the farm that summer. She took me back to Seattle, and I grew up there, never knowing who my real parents were."

Eva. Another little light clicked on over my head.

"Eva Lindgren is your mother?" I said. She did look a bit like the woman in the picture, I thought, although she was fat and Ingrid was thin. They had the same hair line, the deep widow's peak, that Peter had, too. Otherwise he must resemble his Polish father.

"Yes, that's right."

"Did Emil know about you when he married her?"

"Yes, she told him. They were both working for the Isacsons then in Stockholm. Emil was a lot older than Eva—I suppose she married him for security. He's always been good to her."

"Why did Eva give you up?"

"She had to work for a living, and I was a handicap. Anyway, she told me that at the time she was too miserable to know what she was doing. Ingrid was there and talked her into it, and Ingrid couldn't have children of her own."

"But they didn't tell you you were adopted?"

"No, they wanted me to think they were my parents. I found out after I was grown from some letters hidden away in the desk. They were in Swedish, of course, but I'd learned it from Mother —Ingrid, that is. When I confronted Mother with the letters, she told me the whole story and said that Eva and her husband were living on Capri now."

"So you came here and looked them up?"

"Well, not quite that fast. I'm an actor, Kim. Acting is the only thing I've ever cared about. My parents always let me do anything I wanted to. They wanted me to go to college, but when I asked for the money instead, they gave it to me. I went to Hollywood and took acting and dancing

lessons—I'd been taking them for years at home—and managed to get some bit parts, mostly in TV. But it was rough sledding and my money ran out.

"That's when I decided to come to Italy. Lots of Americans get jobs in the studios here. It was better than Hollywood, but not too spectacular. I ended up in Naples dancing in a nightclub. Naturally I came over here to look Eva up."

"I suppose she was overjoyed to see you."

"Sure—all that suppressed maternity, you know. She'd never had any more children. She just about went nuts over me. I always met her outside Capriccio, though. I didn't want the Isacsons to know about me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't want any trouble. By that time I'd got—involved in things they wouldn't have approved of. I'd meet Eva when she went out to shop."

"What had you got involved in? Smuggling?"

"Oh, it was just gambling at first. I ran up some debts. Eva gave me money, but it wasn't enough to do much good. Then the big boss in Naples suggested that I could use Capriccio as a pickup station for them. It was getting too hot on the mainland. He said that if I'd work for them a

while he'd cancel my debts and pay me well besides."

"So of course you were delighted with the opportunity."

"Not particularly. I wouldn't like to be arrested, but he didn't leave me much choice. The villa had been used before for smuggling, but not after the Isacsons bought it. Now that the old man was dead and nobody was there but a sick old woman and the Lindgrens, it seemed safe enough."

"How long has this been going on?"

"A couple of years."

"How on earth did you get the Lindgrens to go along with it?"

"I told Eva that the big bad gangsters would bump me off because of my gambling debts if I didn't do what they wanted!" He grinned. "I guess she'd seen a lot of old movies, because she believed me. Somehow she got Emil to cooperate. You're a woman, you probably know how women manage these things. He didn't like it, though. Not a bit."

"It was you Fru Isacson heard in the cave one night?" I asked.

"Yes; that was close. We never thought the old

lady would get up to investigate. But then she got sick and was always doped up, so she didn't bother us any more. Everything went fine until Jan and Beth came."

"You tried to frighten them away?"

"No. Beth was just naturally scared of the cave and imagined she heard things. Funny, isn't it. Until the night I had to pull another job. We thought they were safely doped, but Beth was awake and came down."

"Did you push her down the steps?"

"No, we didn't even know she was there until she came tumbling down. Emil was with me—I needed him to help me launch the boat. I'd always let him know a week or so in advance when I was coming."

"What would you have done if she hadn't fallen—and confronted you?" I demanded.

He shrugged. "Knocked her out and got away, I suppose. But that would have been the end of our activities there."

"How did you expect to get away with it after Arne came?"

"He could have been drugged, like Jan. But Emil double-crossed me and told him everything. It was funny how you figured it all out—except

that you thought Arne was doing the smuggling! Did you really think that clod was capable of playing such a dangerous game?"

"I did find it hard to believe," I admitted, "but I couldn't see any other solution. Were Arne and Emil planning to trap you, then?"

"Yes, of course. They'd contacted the police and were doing what they were told. And I'd have been caught tonight if you, my darling Kim, had not helpfully told me the whole story. I'll admit I was knocked for a loop when you told me, but I managed to cover it up."

"I thought you were worried about me," I said bitterly. "But how could I have told you what was going on when I didn't know myself?"

"You told me enough so that it was obvious. You even guessed about the smuggling, except that you had the roles reversed. The man with the moustache was probably a narcotics agent. I should have been warned when you told me you thought someone was following us, but at the time I just thought you were imagining things. They probably have the villa surrounded. I suppose Arne was to give a signal when I came back, and they'd come in and arrest me. They're going to have a long wait!"

I thought of Arne sleeping peacefully and Emil unconscious, and gave a mental groan. How stupid could anybody get!

"I don't understand why you went through with it tonight, knowing it was a trap," I said.

"I didn't intend to at first. I'll admit I was scared green. Do you think I liked walking in there tonight, knowing the police were all around it? But when I called the boss yesterday, he told me to go through with it, anyway. The police wouldn't make a move until I had the stuff. So all I had to do was to make the pickup and keep going. Naturally I can't go back to Capriccio. The boss is arranging for me to be met at a certain spot on the coast—but he's not too happy about it."

I had been so interested in Peter's story that I hadn't been paying any attention to where we were headed. Now I realized that we were certainly not returning to the cove but were heading for the end of the island. I could see the Faraglioni rising not far away.

Thanks to my incredible stupidity, the police would find the bird flown, and the smugglers would get away with their revolting loot.

"What about me?" I asked. "What are you going to do with me?"

"You insisted on coming, you know. I didn't invite you. As I said, it's your funeral. I don't know what the men who will meet us will decide to do with you. It's out of my hands."

It seemed only too obvious to me what the men would decide to do. For the first time I realized the danger I was in.

"Why did Emil attack you?" I asked. "Wasn't he supposed to keep quiet and let you go to make the pickup?"

"Yes, but I knew I probably wouldn't see him again, and I was furious with him for going to Isacson. I accused him of betraying me, and he started yelling and calling me names and then came at me, so I had to hit him. I guess he'd had it all bottled up in him for a long time. He never did like me; I suppose he was jealous of my father."

I put my hand on his arm and said pleadingly, "Peter, don't go through with this! Go back to Capriccio and give yourself up."

"Are you nuts? Why should I do that?"

"You'll be caught eventually, anyway, or your gangster friends will kill you when you aren't any more use to them."

"They'd kill me a lot faster if I double-crossed

them! No, the boss promised he'd let me out after this job. I figured I'd go to Spain. They're making a lot of movies there now, and some Americans are doing pretty good. Clint Eastwood—"

"Peter! Don't you care what happens to me?"

He looked at me, his eyes glittering coldly in the moonlight.

"Not particularly," he replied.

I moved away from him and sat with my head in my hands, angry and frightened and thoroughly disgusted with myself.

"Why did you get involved with me in the first place?" I cried. "What did you want?"

"Eva told me she overheard the old woman asking you to do some snooping for her, so I figured it might be a good idea to cultivate you."

"You left the camera so that I would pursue you, didn't you?"

"Of course. You have no idea the sacrifices I made to create the character of the Peter I thought you would fall for. I even cut off all my beautiful hair! It will take months for it to grow back properly, but I knew you wouldn't approve of it—little square that you are. I rather enjoyed it, though. It was the best role I ever played. I almost came to believe in that Peter myself."

"If you wanted to—to cultivate me, as you say, why did you try to frighten me away? It was you in my room that night, wasn't it?"

"I knew I couldn't frighten you away. I just wanted to soften you up—make you so nervous about the villa that you'd stay in your room at night. Drugging you might not work—it didn't with Beth. Anyway, it was partly just as a lark. I was so damned bored, waiting around to make the pickup, but the boss always made me stay there a couple of weeks in case the shipment came through ahead of schedule."

"How did you manage that—that awful face?"

"Didn't I do that beautifully?" He looked very pleased with himself. "I went to the garden the night before—Eva gave me a key to the gate—and made a cast of the face of the statue. Before I left I did a few dog imitations, until I saw you looking out the window. Then I took off. The next day I took the cast to a place in Sorrento that does theatrical work and had a mask made and painted with luminous paint. Wasn't it marvelous? I wore a black body suit. I'm thinking of working out a ballet—"

"Peter," I interrupted wearily, "why did you invite me up to your room that day?"

"Oh, I'd caught a glimpse of Isacson following us, and I wanted to bug him."

"You never intended to make love to me, though."

"No, but I tried to make you fall in love with me. I thought it might be useful in a pinch. I didn't quite pull it off, though, did I? Where did I go wrong? Did I overdo the clean-cut American-boy bit?"

"I'm afraid so. Nobody was ever quite that good."

"I guess I underestimated you, Kim. Maybe I would have done better as myself!"

"I doubt it. I don't care much for dope smugglers."

"I'm not a dope smuggler. Only incidentally, at any rate. I am an actor!"

"Well, I don't like them much, either."

A look of contempt crossed his face for a moment. "Then we're even," he said spitefully, "because I don't care much for your type at all!"

I nodded to myself. Peter was simply a first-class heel.

We were passing the Faraglioni now, their dark massive shapes looming up on our left. We were still about half a mile from shore. I knew it would

be a long, long trip back to the mainland in our little boat. I wondered what would happen to me when we got there.

I looked at the package lying on the bottom of the boat. Suddenly it all boiled up inside of me—my anger, frustration, self-scorn, and the hatred of the ugliness I had become caught up in. I simply couldn't stand it any longer. In one swift movement I picked up the package that contained so much horror and death, stood up, and tossed it overboard as far as I could throw it.

Peter let out a roar of anger and dismay. "Hey! What do you think you're doing!" He let go of the tiller and lunged forward, trying to grab at the package that was floating off over the Mediterranean. It was too far away. While he was lying there across the side of the boat, stretching out his hand in a futile effort to retrieve the package that was too far away, I picked up an oar from the bottom of the boat and hit him over the head with all the strength I could muster.

He slumped down unconscious at my feet.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I stood there looking at him for a few minutes while the boat went around and around in erratic circles. I had never knocked anyone out before, and it made me feel very queer indeed. I wondered if I had killed him. But when I knelt and felt for his pulse, it seemed strong and fairly steady.

I stepped over him and grabbed the tiller. I had grown up handling boats in Virginia, but I must admit that cruising down the Rappahannock on a summer day was not quite the same thing as finding my way along an unfamiliar coast in the moonlight and then maneuvering through a narrow pass among jagged rocks. If it hadn't been for the torch still burning on the beach, I would never have found the entrance to the cove.

But find it I did, and returned to the villa to

find the police there trying to question a very groggy Arne and a dazed Emil and a quite hysterical Eva.

"And that's the way it was, Fru Isacson," I concluded the following day. I was sitting by the chaise longue where she reclined, bright-eyed and excited. "Everybody kept telling me, 'Stay in your room, Kim! Stay in your room!' I guess I should have stayed in my room."

"Oh, no, Kim! I think you were enormously clever—and very brave!"

"Clever? After warning the enemy, drugging your grandson so that he couldn't signal the police, and throwing away the evidence? With friends like me, the police don't need any enemies!"

"Oh, well," she said calmly, "it all turned out for the best. At least you captured Peter. Imagine! Eva never told me she had a son! People are surprising, aren't they."

"They are, indeed!" I agreed fervently.

"I do hope the police won't arrest Emil and Eva. I don't know what I'd do without them."

"I shouldn't think they would; there's no evi-

dence against them. For that matter, there's no real evidence against Peter—after I threw it into the Mediterranean. Only my word, and Emil's. We'll know more when Arne gets back from Naples."

The nurse came in then and asked me to leave, so I wandered down to the terrace to wait for Arne. He had gone to Naples with the police and Peter the night before, but he had called that morning to say he would be home soon. It was nearly lunchtime now.

Finally he came through the gate and walked over to where I was standing, waiting with some trepidation.

It was the first time I had seen him alone since the night before. I wondered if he was angry with me for giving him the doped coffee. But he was grinning at me cheerfully.

"What happened?" I asked. "Have they arrested Peter?"

"You might say he is being detained for questioning. He seems quite willing to tell them anything they want to know. He has already given them some names, including that of the one he refers to as the 'big boss,' and he has agreed to tes-

tify, so I imagine they'll let him go eventually. They were never particularly interested in him, only in the men he worked for."

"And Emil and Eva?"

"The police aren't going to arrest them, if that is what you mean. There is no evidence that they have broken any laws."

"I'm glad of that. Are the police mad at me for destroying the evidence?"

"A little annoyed, perhaps, but since they are getting the information they wanted, I think they are prepared to forgive you."

"I wasn't thinking when I did it. I just wanted to get rid of the horrid stuff."

"That is understandable."

I looked up at him rather timidly. "Will you forgive me for switching thermos bottles on you?"

"Since I was trying to dope you, I can hardly be angry because you turned the tables on me! I wanted you to sleep through the proceedings."

"And I wanted *you* to sleep through them! I was afraid the police would shoot you when they tried to arrest you."

"I am flattered! I mean, that you cared enough about me even when you thought I was a criminal to want to save me."

"I don't suppose that Eva knew that you and Emil were plotting to trap her son."

"No, we couldn't let her know—she would have gone straight to Peter to warn him."

"Why didn't you tell me what was going on, Arne? Then I wouldn't have loused everything up so!"

"I wanted to very much, but the agent wouldn't allow it."

"Was he the man with the moustache?"

"Yes. He was sent here to keep an eye on Peter —to see if he contacted anyone."

"I thought he was following me."

"He didn't like it at all when Peter made friends with you, but he still wouldn't let me warn you. The night Peter came to your room and frightened you with the mask, I was furious and wanted to tell you everything then, so I called the agent and met him in town and tried to convince him that we should tell you, but he still said no, that women could not be trusted, that you might be in love with Peter and warn him."

"I followed you that day."

"You did?" He looked astonished.

"Yes. I thought you were meeting another

criminal of some sort. I hadn't figured out about the smuggling then."

He sighed. "You are quite a girl, Kim. I can see that I will have to watch my step with you!"

I leaned wearily on the balustrade and gazed at the Faraglioni. They were as beautiful and indifferent as ever; nothing that went on on Capri ever surprised them, I mused.

"It's hard to realize it's all over," I said. "I imagine your grandmother will leave the villa to you now, Arne."

"I don't care whether she does or doesn't. I am going back to my job in Rome when she is gone, anyway. I don't think I am ready for full-time novel writing yet. I miss the newspaper work. Kim—"

"Yes, Arne?"

"Were you in love with him at all—even a little bit?"

I smiled. "He was very charming, but he never seemed quite real to me. You weren't worried about me, were you?"

"Yes and no. The police had told me about Peter's underworld activities in Naples, and I didn't want you involved in any of that. I was also

concerned about what use he meant to make of your—ah—friendship."

"I was a dope to let him fool me like that!"

"No, you weren't. He is a clever actor. Maybe someday he will become a famous Hollywood star, and you can tell your children, 'My dears, I once knocked him over the head with an oar when he was smuggling dope on the Isle of Capri!' "

I laughed. "And they will say, 'A likely story! Really, Mama!' "

"Well, thank God it's over. I've been awfully jittery the whole time. This sort of thing is not my line. I wasn't cut out to trap dope smugglers—I am only a cowardly writer."

"I suppose you will write up the story for your paper."

"I will, indeed!"

"I see now why you tried to discourage me from coming here. But when I came, anyway, did you have to remain so—so unfriendly?"

"I didn't mean to seem unfriendly, Kim. But I was worried, and I had decided that no matter how adorable you were, I must keep my mind on my business until the affair was over. After all, it was only eight days—but I can assure you it was *not* easy."

"We didn't get off to a very good start, did we?" I mused. "First I thought you didn't like me, then I figured you had tried to scare Beth away so you could inherit the villa, and then I thought you were a dope smuggler! Maybe we'd better go back to the beginning and start all over—pretend we're meeting for the first time." I held out my hand. "How do you do, Herr Isacson? I am very happy to make your acquaintance."

He shook my hand, his blue eyes laughing down at me.

"How do you do, Froken Stewart? No—wait—I have a better idea!"

He took me in his arms and gave me a thorough and completely delightful kiss. "Why don't we start from there instead?" he suggested. "Wouldn't it be more interesting?"

"Well—yes," I had to admit. "Much more interesting."

The Mysterious Grotto

LOUISE BERGSTROM

Kim Stewart's view of Capri was seen from the steamer taking her and nineteen other teachers, on a summer tour of Europe, to the dock at the Marina Grande. She had not dreamed that Capri would be so mountainous, having had visions of flatter ground and palm trees instead of a volcanic island dotted with olive groves and cypresses planted by man.

One of the things Kim wanted to do on Capri was to look up Beth Carter Isacson, a girl from her boarding-school days who now resided, with her Swedish husband, Jan, on the island. But when Kim arrived at Casa Capriccio, she was told by a servant that Beth and Jan had gone back to Sweden. This in itself would not have concerned Kim if later, on a cruise around Capri, she had not spotted what looked exactly like Jan's double standing on the terrace of the villa.